





THE LADY
OF THE LANE



She protested that it wasn't fair to allow him to plant everything.

THE LADY OF THE LANE

BY
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TO DANAH
WHO IS THE DAUGHTER OF
ISOBEL AND DAN

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THE
LADY OF THE LANE

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I

INTRODUCING ELIZABETH

THE grounds of the Bretton Country Club had been turned over to the girls of Miss Grimshawe's school one fair spring afternoon for their annual tennis tournament. The young ladies covering the velvet greensward around the clay courts looked like so many spring flowers. In snow white, in dainty pinks, and blues, and browns, they made a picture at which the matrons looked on with nodding smiles of approval. As usual, the two Brookfield girls were quite the smartest, though to some the pert sauci-

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ness and self-consciousness with which they paraded their gowns, detracted somewhat from their appearance.

“They seem a trifle too much like dressmakers’ models,” observed Mrs. Thornton to her friend Mrs. Oliver. “Compare them now with Elizabeth Churchill; is n’t she exquisite?”

Mrs. Oliver glanced toward a group of girls to the left. Five of them were seated in a half-circle about a sixth, who appeared to be a few years their senior. The latter was dressed in a costume of hand-embroidered muslin of the finest texture and workmanship. Only the simplicity of its design prevented it from overdressing her fifteen years. Her brown hair was arranged as only the deft fingers of a French maid makes possible, and was surmounted by a lingerie hat. Her fine skin was clear, if a trifle lacking in color. Her dark brows were prettily arched, while her nose and

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mouth, though still undeveloped, suggested latent strength.

“Exquisite?” repeated Mrs. Oliver, thoughtfully; “yes, perhaps a trifle too exquisite.”

“That would be true of almost any other girl in such a costume,” answered Mrs. Thornton; “but Elizabeth *wears* her clothes; she does n’t merely exhibit them.”

“Does she do anything else?” questioned Mrs. Oliver, looking at her friend with a smile.

Mrs. Thornton considered a moment and then answered frankly: “I do not know.”

She added after a second’s further thought:

“Somehow, you don’t expect any more of her. If we were living in the days of old-fashioned princesses, I should expect her to be of the blood royal.”

At that moment Roy Thornton, who, with some other young friends of the

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girls, had been invited to witness the tournament, came up to make sure that his mother was comfortable. He was a stalwart-looking fellow, with the color and bearing of an athlete. At the Bedloe School, which, among the boys, ranked in popularity with Miss Grimshawe's school for girls, he was easily the star of the games. He was an all-round man, playing a good game of football, a better game of baseball, and even a fair game of tennis. While not heavy for his age, he was both quick and strong, and used his head quite as much as his body.

"You want to watch this next set," he informed his mother; "Nance Barton plays Miss Winthrop in the finals. Nance has been outplaying herself to-day."

Mrs. Thornton smiled at her son's enthusiasm. She knew he was rather fond of Nance.

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"I hope Nance will win," she declared.

As she turned her eyes to the court to look at Nance, when the latter strode into position and tossed aside her white sweater, she again caught sight of Elizabeth. The latter was joining the general hand-clapping in, however, a rather perfunctory fashion.

"Does n't Elizabeth play tennis?" she questioned her son.

Roy followed his mother's eyes to the dainty figure on the side-lines.

"No," he answered, "she does n't. But I 'll wager she could if she wished to."

"What makes you think that?"

"I don't know," he answered frankly. "She does n't seem to do anything, and yet she makes you feel all the time that, if she chose, she could star in everything. If she were a boy, I 'd make her come out and try for every team in spite of herself."

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“She seems to be popular,” commented Mrs. Oliver, turning her eyes toward the group.

“And yet she is n’t,” answered Roy, with a perplexed frown. “The younger girls hang around her, but Nance says the girls of her own class don’t like her. The boys call her Lady Elizabeth, you know.”

Just then Nance served the first ball, and this put an effectual end to the discussion. Roy went off at once to watch the game, and, after a moment’s hesitation, took a position near Elizabeth.

Nance Barton was a brilliant but uncertain player. She was quick on her feet, nervous in her movements, and a trifle over-eager to make her points on single shots. Her antagonist, on the other hand, played a steady and consistent game, placing the ball with irritating deliberateness. She never made double faults, and attempted neither drives nor

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kills. She won the first set, six—five, and went off the court in much better condition than Nance.

Roy turned impulsively to Elizabeth.

“Some one ought to tell Nance to steady down,” he exclaimed. “She’s not doing herself justice.”

“I thought she played very well,” answered Elizabeth, indifferently.

“She’s playing herself all to pieces,” answered Roy. “She won’t last through another set at this rate. I wish I could see her.”

Both girls, however, had retired into the club-house to rest after their efforts, and were inaccessible.

“Look here, Beth,” exclaimed Roy, “you can get at her. I’d like to see her win because she’s the better player. Why don’t you go and tell her to take her time in the next set?”

Elizabeth settled back more comfortably in her chair. As a matter of fact,

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she and Nance were at present in the midst of one of those petty quarrels in which, with one girl or another, Elizabeth was almost constantly involved. These sprang, almost invariably, not from anything she said or did, but from a certain patrician air of superiority, which, after all, Elizabeth assumed more for the spice of its effect than anything else. The romance of her nature found vent in assuming the air of the princess, but she acted the part so sincerely that this was often mistaken for sheer snobishness. She had given Nance the idea that she considered athletics for girls unladylike.

“Do you think it is quite fair to coach from the side-lines?” she asked Roy.

“Coach them both!” answered Roy, quickly. “Tell Miss Winthrop not to be afraid to run up to the net. I want to see them both play their best.”

Through half-closed eyes Elizabeth

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glanced listlessly across the sun-beaten interval between her and the club-house.

“It’s so very warm!” she murmured.

“Warm!” cried Roy, looking at her in astonishment.

“And I don’t believe in giving advice to people,” she added.

“But you want to see Nance win, don’t you? She’s in your class.” Roy was as outspoken as Elizabeth herself. He said frankly whatever he thought at the moment, a quality that Elizabeth honestly admired.

“I don’t mind if she wins,” Elizabeth answered indifferently.

“Then hurry up and tell her,” replied Roy, springing to his feet. “I know how it is when you get into a game. You forget that the end is going to count for more than the beginning.”

Roy seemed to be so much in earnest that, to her own surprise, Elizabeth actually arose and started toward the club-

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house. She took her time, however, and walked in so leisurely a fashion that Roy, by her side, urged her to hurry.

“They ’ll be out again in a minute,” he pleaded.

“I need n’t hurry,” she insisted stubbornly.

“You ’ll be too late if you don’t.”

“Then, very well—I *shall* be too late.”

She walked with the stately gait of a princess, and daintily picking up her skirts (which did not need picking up at all), she moved on into the club-house. At the door of the dressing-room, however, she realized what she had undertaken to do. This meant not only the sacrifice of her pride, but it laid her open to a fine snub from Nance. For a moment she hesitated, but only for a moment. Roy was trusting her to deliver his message, and now that she had undertaken the mission, she would carry it through. In answer to her knock, she

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was admitted just as Nance was ready to go out. The latter looked surprised at Elizabeth's presence. Without explanation or apology, Elizabeth said to her:

"Roy has been watching the game, and he wanted me to tell you that you ought to steady down."

"Thank you," stammered Nance. "It—it was kind of you to come."

"Please don't mention it," replied Elizabeth.

"And you 'll thank him and tell him I 'll try?"

For a moment Elizabeth forgot her rôle of princess.

"Try!" she exclaimed. "If I were you, I 'd win. You can do it."

For a second Nance seemed upon the point of impulsively taking Elizabeth's hand, and there and then declaring a truce. But at this point, some imp of perverseness prompted Elizabeth to observe languidly:

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“I’m sure it won’t be so exhausting to watch you if you do steady down.”

Nance, with flushed face, hurried off without another word. Elizabeth had just time to repeat to Miss Winthrop the rest of Roy’s message before the second set began. When she returned to her place, she found Roy in his old position, but her chair occupied by Helen Brookfield. The latter, in an attempt to make herself interesting, was asking of Roy one insipid question after another, but he was far too much interested in the game to give more than perfunctory answers. He saw with satisfaction that both girls were following his advice, and, in consequence, playing a much snappier game.

Nance won the set by the score of six—three.

The game stood five all in the third set, and the sixth went to Nance. But she was tired after this, and relaxed her efforts. In this mood she lost her spirit,

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and the seventh and eighth games went easily to her opponent. As Nance walked up to Miss Winthrop to congratulate her upon the victory, Elizabeth shook her head.

“Nance ought not to have given in,” she exclaimed to herself.

She strolled to the front of the club-house, where she again saw Roy, as he was assisting his mother into his car. He mechanically removed his cap, bowed, and then clambered into his seat without another look in her direction. Elizabeth drew back a little into the crowd now fast gathering before the door. Roy had just started his machine when a groom drove up with two prancing young horses. At the sound of the barking motor, Elizabeth saw them rear, and then caught a glimpse of the earnest face of the young man in the rear seat of the trap. The next second she saw, almost in front of the horses, the group of young girls who

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had so lately surrounded her chair. With frightened screams they scrambled out of the way, but Louise, the youngest, tripped and fell. Roy had stopped and bolted to the ground, the young man back of the groom sprang out at the same instant and rushed forward to the side of Louise, and two or three others started for the horses' heads. But Elizabeth was already there. She seized the nearer animal by the bit and held on with grim determination. The horse jerked up his head, bolted to the right and left, but Elizabeth did not let go. In another second Roy was by her side. Still Elizabeth, with white face, held on.

"Beth," cried Roy, fearing she would be trampled, "let go!"

"Louise—" gasped Elizabeth.

But the young man who had borne Louise out of danger now came up. "She's safe," he said quietly.

The horse gave another wild paw, and

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this time caught his shoe in Elizabeth's dress. Then she felt a hand close over hers, and found herself half carried back into the crowd. When she raised her eyes, the stranger was looking anxiously down at her. "I hope you are n't hurt?" he asked.

She did n't know whether she was hurt or not, but she was decidedly uncomfortable at the gaze of the crowd which, with excited queries, began to gather round her.

"You will allow me to drive you to your home?" questioned the young stranger eagerly.

But Roy pressed up.

"My machine is ready," he said with decision. "I 'll have her home in ten minutes."

Under his breath he whispered to Elizabeth:

"It was bully of you!"

The praise brought back the color to

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her cheeks. She lowered her eyes, and as she did so caught sight of the rent in her dress. It was this which restored her self-possession. She drew herself up with an exaggerated haughtiness of manner.

“Thank you both,” she said coldly, “but our man is waiting. Will you call him?”

They both hurried off, and in a minute more returned with the machine. Then they assisted her to enter as all the girls and all the matrons looked on.

“I hope I may call to inquire after you to-morrow,” said the stranger, deferentially.

As she sped out of the gate, the excited hum of the onlookers following her, Elizabeth found a bit of pasteboard in her hand and glanced down at it. It vouchsafed no further information than that the stranger’s name was—Mr. Reginald Crawford.

II

THE LADY OF THE TOWERS

THE butler, who looked very much like the frog footman in "Alice in Wonderland," a book which Elizabeth in her younger days had read and reread, came to the door of the big drawing-room. He sidled in, adjusted himself like a sentinel, leveled his eyes respectfully a few inches above his mistress's head, and made the announcement:

"Mr. Churchill wishes to see you in the library, miss."

Elizabeth lazily smothered a yawn, turned her pretty blue eyes, and stared at the man indifferently.

Martin repeated his announcement as mechanically as a phonograph:

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“Mr. Churchill wishes to see you in the library, miss.”

Elizabeth sprang to her feet.

“Ker-chug!” she exploded.

The butler stared as though some one had prodded him from behind. He was not quite sure whether to interpret this very peculiar exclamation as a sneeze or a warning. However, he grimly determined to do his duty.

“Mr. Churchill—” he began once more, as soon as he was able to compose himself.

“You look exactly like the bullfrog in ‘Alice,’ ” Elizabeth interrupted him.

Martin appeared relieved. After all, there was no harm in looking like a bullfrog. It was quite possible that, in his short trousers and white waistcoat, he *did* look like a bullfrog, but, as far as he knew, bullfrogs were honest beasts, or fishes, or whatever they might be, and so a man

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need n't take offense at such a comparison.

“Yes, miss,” he answered respectfully, and stood aside as Elizabeth lifted an imaginary train and swept grandly out of the room. With her nose upturned, she moved across the hall and knocked, not quite so grandly, at her father’s study door. In reply to his abrupt “Come in,” she dropped her hand, lowered her head to a more normal angle, and stole quietly to his side.

Mr. Churchill was, as usual, bending over a heap of papers. His strained, wrinkled face looked more than ordinarily care-worn this evening. He motioned his daughter to a chair beside his table, and went on with his work. She had been ready to cuddle up to him, but a quick glance at his brow warned her to obey his unspoken command in silence.

The curtains over the curved plate-glass

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windows were drawn aside so that she could see across the sweep of fields surrounding "The Towers" and all the way to the twinkling lights of the city, some three miles distant. In the foreground and within a hundred rods of where she sat, stood an untenanted farm-house. It afforded an odd contrast to the magnificent Churchill residence. But because these acres surrounding it, and now lying in the path of the growing city, had formed the basis of his fortune, and because into this farm-house Spencer Churchill had brought his bride twenty-five years ago, he had allowed it to remain undisturbed. Ten years later, when Elizabeth was born, the mother had died there, and further hallowed it. That he had preserved the old house was proof of more sentiment than he was usually credited with by his business associates. Men had come to look upon Mr. Churchill as a "human dynamo" and even his

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daughter could not help comparing him, at times, with the big touring-car which throbbed to the door every morning to carry her to school.

In the quiet of the spring evening and beneath the white light of a full moon, the rambling story-and-a-half structure looked more like some ghostly illusion than a reality. It was painted white, and the green blinds, now faded to a robin's-egg blue, took on a sort of phosphorescent hue. A low shed connected it with a barn which for years had stabled nothing but shadows.

Mr. Churchill finished his study of the legal-looking document in front of him, ran his finger through the clutter of other papers, and drew out a note so dainty that it seemed out of place there. He glanced up.

"I received this communication to-day from Miss Grimshawe," he informed his daughter.

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Elizabeth turned scarlet. The principal, then, had at last carried out her oft-repeated threat. This had not occurred to the girl as even a possibility. Her expression changed instantly to one of genuine concern.

“Among other things,” he resumed, “Miss Grimshawe writes this: ‘While I find a great deal to commend in your daughter, she seems unwilling to exert herself in her studies. To speak very frankly, Elizabeth has shown herself so indolent and unruly, that I feel it would be not only for her good, but for the good of the school, if she were withdrawn, at least temporarily.’ ”

He tossed aside the letter.

“There is more,” he said, “but those two sentences sum up the matter.”

He turned his troubled eyes to the window, and rested them on the old farmhouse. He always took his troubles

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there. Though to others this building, with its unlighted windows and its closed doors, stood only as a deserted house, to him it was still as fragrant with living memories as was the May garden with blossoms.

He turned his eyes upon his daughter. She sat now with her hands clasped in her lap, her head thrown forward a little, just as her mother used to sit at the end of the day. He was half thinking aloud when he said gently:

“I had hoped my girl was going to be like her mother.”

Elizabeth shuddered without daring to look up. She had learned how deeply her father was moved whenever he referred to that past. Her firm mouth relaxed, and her throat ached with sobs forced back. To her this mother was only a shadowy figure growing out of her father’s memory, and yet, vague in outline

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though the figure was, it stood ever in the background of Elizabeth's thoughts as something sacred.

"Your mother had none of your advantages," continued Mr. Churchill. "When I brought her to the little farm, we did not have much money. At the beginning, she had time for little else besides the housework. She cooked and swept and sewed all day, so that at night she was often too tired for anything but sleep. You, on the other hand, have always had servants, schools, horses, travel—"

He leaned toward Elizabeth as though, in one searching glance, he would discover the difference between his daughter and his wife. He gave it up, and, with a frown, once more sought the solace of the old farm-house. For fully five minutes he did not speak again.

Then he brought his big hand down upon the arm of his chair.



Elizabeth shuddered without daring to look up.

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“I have it!” he exclaimed.

Elizabeth shrank back in fright. Her father stepped quickly to her side.

“Stand up, my girl,” he commanded.

She obeyed, her blue eyes big and round.

“Elizabeth,” he said, “I was wrong; it was your mother who had every advantage. It is you who have been handicapped, not she. I see it now. You are laboring under the heavy burden of having too much. It is weakening you. You are not strong enough to bear it.”

Elizabeth did not understand. That sounded like a topsy-turvy way of putting things.

“I have neglected you,” he ran on; “I have deprived you of the great blessing of work. But it is n’t too late to remedy this. I will begin at once. You shall have every opportunity your mother had. You shall start where we started. You

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shall begin where we began—in the little house by the lane."

Elizabeth turned from him to stare again at the dim outlines of the old buildings below the house. They looked so somber and ghostly that she caught her breath.

"Not—not there, Daddy!" she exclaimed.

"Yes," he answered, "you must begin there. The house is just as it was when your mother came into it. I have kept it in repair, though, since we left it, no one has crossed the threshold but myself. You shall take up her life where she left off. You shall live her life until you grow strong as she was strong."

"You mean you want me to live there all the time?" she gasped.

"Exactly. I will give you for household expenses all I was able to give her when we started. Out of that your mother made a home. Out of that she

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bought her clothes. You must do the same. I will give you a cow and some chickens, as we had. I will have a man do for you the work I myself did around the place for her. But you must make your own butter, if you have butter; you must raise your own chickens, if you want to have eggs."

"I?" she cried. "But I don't know how to do any of those things, Daddy."

"No, you don't. It's my fault that you don't. But you are no older than your mother was when she learned. She was taught, and you shall be taught. I have an old friend who is still living in the country. I will have her come and live with you and teach you whatever you wish to learn. Teach you, mind, not work for you. You must provide for her, too, as your mother provided for me."

"But I may have Marie," stammered the girl. "I may have Marie and—"

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“You will have no more Maries to dress you,” answered her father, abruptly. “You will dress yourself in such clothes as you may make for yourself.”

Elizabeth stared blankly at her father. The scheme sounded so absurd and impossible that she could n’t believe he was in earnest. She could n’t even imagine getting along without Marie to do her hair and put on her things. And what would she do without Martin to open the doors and announce dinner for her? And what would she do without the chef to cook the dinner? Or Lizette to serve it? She was half inclined to laugh. But when she looked up again into her father’s eyes she was checked.

“You are coming with me?” she asked.

He thought a moment. Then he shook his head.

“Make a home such as your mother made,” he answered, “and then—and then I will join you.”

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Elizabeth broke down. She sank into the chair, and began to sob.

A light knock sounded upon the library door. In reply to Mr. Churchill's answer; the butler stepped in, assumed his usual rigid pose, and made the announcement:

“Dinner is served.”

“Very well, Martin,” Mr. Churchill answered.

He turned to his daughter and offered his arm, as was his cavalier-like custom.

“Come,” he said, “you shall dine with me until Mrs. Trumbull arrives.”

Elizabeth rose, but, lowering her eyes, turned a little away from him.

“You will excuse me, Daddy?” she begged. “I don't feel at all hungry tonight.”

“Then,” he decided, “you shall come and pour my coffee.”

Mr. Churchill escorted Elizabeth to her place. As she seated herself, she caught

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the aroma of her favorite soup. Her father raised the cover of the tureen with the inquiry:

“A little soup, Elizabeth?”

It took courage on her part, but she answered firmly:

“No, thank you, Daddy.”

It seemed as though the chef had prepared that night every dish which he knew was sure to please her. Following the soup there was some deliciously prepared fish, the very sight of which made her swallow hard. At the broiled chicken which she saw next, her eyes grew blurry in sympathy with her own martyrdom. Then what should appear but some pâtés which she herself had asked the chef to make. But, though sorely tempted, she bravely shook her head when her father offered her one of the delicious titbits. She had the satisfaction of seeing him start at this, but the next second his eyes nar-

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rowed in an uncomfortable way they had when he seemed to be reading her thoughts. She poured his coffee and watched him enjoy the pastry with a relish quite unusual for him. With the remark that it was the best he had ever tasted, he helped himself to a second portion. This he munched with every possible outward show of satisfaction consistent with good breeding.

As they rose from the table, he neglected to inquire further into the state of her health, and, with a brief good-night kiss, left her and returned to his study. In the meantime, Lizette had carried word to the chef of the indisposition of her mistress. It was the butler who ventured to steal into the drawing-room where Elizabeth sat before the fire gazing mournfully into the flames.

“I beg pardon, miss,” he inquired; “you are not feeling well?”

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“No, Martin,” she sighed.

“We all has our ups and downs,” he returned philosophically.

“There’s nothing left for me but downs,” she answered.

Running her hand over her forehead, she added resignedly:

“However, I shan’t bother any one much longer.”

“There, miss, I hopes you ’ll be quite yourself in the morning.”

“In the morning?”

She laughed harshly—forebodingly.

“In the morning I may be dead. Will you call Marie?”

Martin started.

“At once, miss,” he said, eager to be of even this small service.

Marie came in immediately. Elizabeth leaned heavily upon her arm in going up the broad staircase to her chamber. But Marie, being more accustomed to such moods as these, appeared less wor-

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ried than Martin. Furthermore, she held what she thought to be a ready solution to the present caprice of her mistress. As soon as she had undressed Elizabeth and helped her into a kimono ready to have her hair brushed for the night, she whispered her secret:

“Now, ma’m’selle, if you will excuse me for a moment—”

“Where are you going, Marie?” inquired Elizabeth, as the maid moved toward the door.

“The chef has prepared a little tray,” announced Marie.

Elizabeth hesitated.

“A little pastry,” whispered Marie; “a bit of orange marmalade and a cup of chocolate.”

Elizabeth swallowed hard. She was now genuinely hungry. In her mind’s eye she saw the dainty tray with its sweet burden of tarts and golden marmalade. Of all things, too, she loved steaming hot

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chocolate with foamy whipped cream upon it, as the chef always prepared it. The mere thought of this whetted her hunger to an acute pain. But a new question entered into the acceptance of these things. She had pretended to her father that she was not hungry. To eat now seemed underhanded. To eat slyly, after playing upon her father's sympathy, was a deceit to which she would not stoop. She shook her head resolutely.

“No,” she answered; “I will have nothing.”

“But, ma’m’selle,” protested Marie, now genuinely worried, “you must not fast like this; you will surely be faint before morning.”

“Very well, then I shall be faint,” answered Elizabeth.

In spite of Marie’s coaxing, Elizabeth held firmly to her resolution and bade the maid do her hair.

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Elizabeth awoke the next morning with a good appetite. A warm morning breeze, fragrant with the perfume of the flowers over which it had blown, bulged in the white curtains at the windows. In front of her stood her pretty white bureau covered with her silver toilet articles; on the floor lay soft Persian rugs; on the wall hung the beautiful pictures which her father had bought on their trip abroad last summer; and, neatly arranged over a chair, was all her dainty apparel. It was impossible to believe that she would not always awake to find these things just as they were now. By the time Marie came in to dress her, she had convinced herself that her father had meant only to frighten her, though she knew such a thing to be against his whole nature.

“How does ma’m’selle feel this morning?” inquired Marie, anxiously.

“Much better, thank you,” answered

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Elizabeth, with a little more than her usual courtesy.

“And ma’m’selle ’s hungry?”

Elizabeth frowned. This reminded her vividly of the incidents of the evening before. She was ravenous. It is a good deal harder to starve oneself when one is hungry, she thought, than it is when one has only an indifferent appetite.

“The chef told me he had a little bird for ma’m’selle this morning,” coaxed Marie.

Elizabeth turned away her head.

“With a bit of jelly, and a cup of chocolate,” continued Marie.

Elizabeth felt her eyes grow moist.

“Oh, Marie,” she finally choked.

Marie could not understand. She finished dressing the girl as quickly as possible, so that she could send her down to her father. The latter was waiting for Elizabeth with his usual grave manner. He did not refer to the subject of last

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night nor to her indisposition. In her relish for breakfast she herself almost forgot it. Mr. Churchill left the house early, still without making reference to any change, and his daughter went about her usual preparations for the day.

At half-past eight Elizabeth stood by the door, dressed for school. Fifteen minutes passed, then a half-hour, but no motor came for her.

III

A MOST UNUSUAL FAIRY GODMOTHER

THAT was a terrible day. Elizabeth wandered about the house, living over her bad dreams of the night before, and with nothing to break the dull monotony until five o'clock that afternoon. It was then that Martin came to the drawing-room for the fiftieth time that day. But now he had a matter of some importance to announce.

"I beg pardon," he murmured, as though he felt some apology were needed, "but there is an elderly party in the hall asking for Mr. Churchill."

"A gentleman, Martin?"

"A woman," answered Martin.

"Her card?" inquired Elizabeth.

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“Her answer was, miss, that she did n’t play cards, and hoped that at her age she would n’t begin.”

“Did she give her name?” asked Elizabeth, breathlessly.

“It sounded like Mrs. Thimble, miss,” answered Martin.

Elizabeth’s first impulse was to retreat to her room. Feeling this woman to be part of a world-wide conspiracy to humiliate her, she conceived an instant dislike of her. Mrs. Trumbull came as an intruder. Even Martin saw this, although he knew nothing of the circumstances which brought her here. But second thought showed Elizabeth that her pride would only be further humbled by being forced to meet the stranger, as in the end she was sure to be, and that flight would be useless and cowardly. She might as well know the worst at once. And, finally, she was extremely curious to see just what Mrs. Trumbull was like, al-

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though she had already made up her mind that she was old, and dowdy, and disagreeable.

“You may show her in, Martin,” Elizabeth decided.

Martin hesitated. He himself was convinced the lady was not quite right in her mind.

“Mr. Churchill will soon be home, miss. Perhaps the party would wait in the hall until then,” he suggested.

“Send her in,” sighed Elizabeth.

A moment later, Martin reappeared.

“Mrs. Thimble,” he murmured.

The lady thus announced turned upon him with a look of withering scorn.

“Thimble!” she exclaimed. “If I had one, I’d snap your ears with it this very minute.”

Martin withdrew hastily, as though afraid she might yet discover that article in the bag she carried in her hand, and fulfil her threat.

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Elizabeth found herself confronting a person wearing a black dress, a shawl, and an odd little bonnet perched upon the back of her head. Her face was lean, wrinkled, and sharp, but by no means unpleasant. Her black eyes twinkled with good humor, and her snow-white hair was drawn back tightly into a snug pug knot. She watched the retreating figure of the butler out of sight, and then exploded, more to herself than Elizabeth:

“What Spence Churchill wants such a creature as that around his house for, is more than I can understand.”

Elizabeth stepped forward haughtily.

“This is Mrs. Trumbull?” she inquired.

Mrs. Trumbull gave a sharp pirouette, stared a second at the girl, and then rushed forward with the evident intention of throwing her arms about Elizabeth’s neck.

“Well, if this is n’t Beth, as I’m a-livin’!”

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“I am Miss Churchill,” Elizabeth acknowledged icily.

Mrs. Trumbull stopped short, and drew herself up until she looked as taut all over as did the white hair at her temples. Her shrewd eyes played over Elizabeth like tiny search-lights. Then folding her hands in front of her, she observed:

“You don’t say.”

“I suppose my father sent for you,” remarked Elizabeth, not feeling at all comfortable.

“I don’t s’pose I’d have got up at four in the morning and ridden all day if he had n’t,” answered Mrs. Trumbull. “And I don’t s’pose I’d do that for any man on earth except Spence Churchill,” she added.

“Won’t you be seated?” said Elizabeth.

Mrs. Trumbull sat down on the edge of a chair, her body making a right angle. She folded her hands, which were encased in black silk gloves, and waited in silence,

Mrs. Trumbull folded her hands and waited in silence.



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evidently determined to throw the burden of all further conversation upon Elizabeth. The latter, feeling that she had failed in her first attempt to overawe her father's guest, was at a loss to know what course to pursue next. She had an uncomfortable sense of not having shown herself to very good advantage. There was enough of quiet, motherly dignity about Mrs. Trumbull to make her ashamed of this.

"I think Father said that you and Mother were old friends," remarked Elizabeth, in attempt to renew conversation.

Mrs. Trumbull's set mouth relaxed at once. Her eyes grew suddenly tender.

"Yes," she said quietly. "I was ten years older than Mary. But we were girls together. And to think that you, her own daughter, never knew her."

She gave a swift look about the room,

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and then met Elizabeth's eyes with a queer, half-laughing scowl.

"But, Lor' sakes, I don't know 's your mother would know *you* livin' in such a house as this."

Elizabeth turned scarlet.

"My mother *should* have lived in such a house," she retorted.

"She deserved to, if that's what you mean," agreed Mrs. Trumbull; "but I dunno 's she'd ha' wanted to. She was happy enough in the old house."

"I should think so!" exclaimed Elizabeth, in sudden resentment; "scrubbing, and cooking, and making her own clothes!"

"She was the best cook in town, and the best dressmaker, too."

"It must have been very hard for her to have to do such things."

"I dunno," answered Mrs. Trumbull, looking at the girl with growing curiosity; "I never heard her say so."

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“Why, she did n’t even have a maid to do her hair!” exclaimed Elizabeth.

For a second, Mrs. Trumbull sat with her mouth wide open.

“Your ma was n’t sickly,” she finally gasped.

“I did n’t say she was,” returned Elizabeth.

“Then what in the world would she want any one fussing around her own head for?” demanded Mrs. Trumbull.

“Why, to be properly dressed, every one needs a maid,” Elizabeth answered, disdainfully.

“I s’pose you have one?” inquired Mrs. Trumbull, holding her breath.

“Of course.”

“Well, I declare! And you look real hearty, too, though you have n’t as much color as I like to see in a girl your age.”

Elizabeth flushed, and then laughed weakly. She was glad no one was around to overhear this conversation.

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"That's almost ridiculous," she returned.

"Thank goodness *I've* always been able to dress myself ever since I could reach the buttons behind my back," answered Mrs. Trumbull.

"Of course any one can, but it's very tiring," replied Elizabeth, sinking back languorously in her chair.

As though to offset this lazy pose as far as possible, Mrs. Trumbull immediately straightened herself once more into a right angle. Her black eyes began to snap.

"If Spence Churchill has dragged me on here, thinking I'm going to dress a girl of your size, he's mighty mistaken," she declared. "He said he wanted me to show you how to do the things your mother did. I'd get out of my grave to do that much for Mary's sake, but I did n't s'pose that meant showing you how to put on your clothes."

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Elizabeth sprang to her feet, angry and indignant.

"I don't want you to show me how to do anything," she cried.

"There now!" returned Mrs. Trumbull, coolly, "with your dander up, you *do* look something like your ma."

Elizabeth started for the door, but before she was half-way across the room, she saw her retreat blocked by her father. He stood looking in at her with a half-amused, half-annoyed expression. She hesitated, and then turned back helplessly. Mr. Churchill strode in after her, with his hand outstretched toward Mrs. Trumbull.

"It was kind of you to come," he said heartily. "I see you have already met my daughter."

Mrs. Trumbull rose eagerly at sound of his voice.

"Spence!" she exclaimed. "It's good to lay eyes on you again."

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"It's good to see *your* eyes again, Sally," he answered. "They are as young as ever."

"It's a wonder they have n't popped out my head at the things I've seen to-day," she answered.

"I've tried often enough to get you to visit me," he reminded her.

"I know it, Spence, but I guess I belong back where things have n't changed so from what they used to be."

He looked troubled for a second. Then he answered soberly, his eyes resting on Elizabeth:

"I don't know but we'd all be better off back there. But you must be tired. Elizabeth should have shown you to your room. We have dinner in half an hour. There'll be time enough to talk after that."

Mrs. Trumbull hesitated.

"Spence," she declared, "if there was a train back home to-night, I'd take it!"

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Elizabeth looked up with interest. But her father placed his hand affectionately upon the little lady's thin shoulders.

"There, there," he comforted her. "You're tired after your long ride. Take my arm, and I'll show you to your room myself."

Mrs. Trumbull glanced once more at Elizabeth, who stood uneasily, with her eyes lowered. Then she took Mr. Churchill's arm, and the two went out.

IV

MARIE DEPARTS

WHEN Elizabeth awoke at fifteen minutes past her usual rising time next morning, she was astonished not to find Marie in the room. She called, but received no response. Springing out of bed, she opened her door and called into the hall. She received no answer. Slowly the truth began to dawn upon her: this was the beginning. She sat upon the edge of the bed and, staring dismally at her clothes, waited for ten minutes, hoping against hope. But no one came. Apparently she had been left here to get into her clothes as best she could. For all her father cared, she could probably sit here until night. The thought roused

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her temper. If they thought she was such a little fool that she could n't dress herself, she would show them they were mistaken.

In a sort of daze she began to pull on her stockings. Her toes went into her heels, and she quite lost her temper in trying to jerk them round. She succeeded, but left them twisted and wrinkled. She clambered into the other clothes one by one. None of them seemed to fit. Her skirt hung awry, her waist was wrinkled, and she was covered with as many bunches and gaps as a poorly done-up bundle. The bunches were very uncomfortable, and through the gaps bits of lace and ribbon protruded. In a final attempt to remedy these faults, she pulled and poked until she was red in the face, and her mirror reflected so ridiculous a figure that she had to bite her lips to keep from crying.

With fingers made clumsy by disuse,

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she next tried to put her hair in order. The average boy could have done as well. She snarled it up while combing it, and pulled out the knots by main force as long as she could endure the pain. She braided it after a fashion, but tried in vain to arrange it properly. In all she was nearly an hour in making herself ugly, where Marie, in half the time, would have left her trim and trig.

And yet, for all this, she took a certain pride in her accomplishment. She had succeeded in clothing herself at any rate, and thereby proved that she was not quite the dunce Mrs. Trumbull apparently thought her. She hurried down-stairs to see what further developments awaited her. She was half afraid lest she should next be forced to cook her own breakfast. Her father was waiting her arrival, though the delay cost him an hour of precious time. He greeted her tenderly, if with a certain amount of curiosity.

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“I was late because Marie did not come,” she explained.

“Marie has gone,” he answered.

“Gone?”

“I have given her an indefinite vacation. You will not need her in your new home.”

“But I shall! Look at me, Daddy.”

She turned around slowly in front of him.

“For a first attempt, I think you did very well,” he assured her.

“I’m a fright, and you’re laughing at me,” she sobbed.

He started at this. Then he placed his arm around her tenderly.

“My dear girl,” he said soberly, “I’m not laughing at you. I’m honestly proud of you. You have proven you can rise to an emergency. Marie declared it would be impossible for you to dress yourself at all.”

“And so did Mrs. Trumbull, I suppose,” returned Elizabeth.

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At that moment, Mrs. Trumbull entered.

"I did n't say so," she admitted frankly, "but I thought so."

"She went up-stairs to give you your first lesson," explained Mr. Churchill.

Elizabeth faced Mrs. Trumbull.

"Thank you," she replied coldly. "But if Daddy wishes me to do such things, I will do them without help."

From a social point of view the breakfast was not a success. Though Mr. Churchill did his best to brighten the conversation, Elizabeth could not help but show her resentment, while still conscious of the gaps in the back of her waist. Mrs. Trumbull herself was not comfortable in her new surroundings, and spent half her time scowling at Lizette, who seemed ever upon the point of laughing at her awkwardness. Every one was glad when Mr. Churchill finally rose. But the next second, Elizabeth felt her heart sink once

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more as her father turned and said quietly:

“I wish to see you in the library, Elizabeth.”

She followed him to the door, where he stood aside to allow her to enter. He began abruptly.

“My girl,” he said, “you begin your new life to-day, and I wish you to understand clearly what I hope it to be. The house and everything in it is yours, as it was your mother’s. You may arrange it to suit yourself; you may run it to suit yourself. In that you are to be absolutely independent. This is true also of the land, the barn, the cow, and the chickens. With these Martin will help you.”

“Martin!” exclaimed Elizabeth.

“In the old country he used to have a small farm. He will do the milking.”

“Martin milk a cow?” gasped Elizabeth.

“Rather than leave you, he has con-

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sented. He is treating you rather better than you have treated him, I should say."

"But he will look too absurd milking a cow in those short trousers and that white waistcoat. Why—"

Mr. Churchill smiled.

"Perhaps he will exchange that livery for a pair of overalls," he suggested.

"Then he will look even more absurd," declared Elizabeth.

"You may dress him as you please," returned her father. "He will do whatever you wish outside the house. Now about Mrs. Trumbull," continued her father, "I am sorry to say I don't think you have treated her very cordially."

"How can I?" demanded Elizabeth.

"She is fine gold," Mr. Churchill answered. "She has consented to remain for your mother's sake. You can make a veritable fairy godmother of her if you choose."

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“Fairy godmother—of her?” exclaimed Elizabeth.

“You will see. If you wish, she will teach you to sew and to cook, and instruct you in all the fine art of housekeeping. Mind, she is there to teach you—as I have told her. And she will do everything else for you, as your mother would have done had she lived.”

Elizabeth’s eyes grew moist.

“Oh, Daddy,” she exclaimed, “I never needed my mother as I do now!”

“Nor I, my girl,” answered her father, quietly. “It is my hope that in this way we may both get nearer to her than we have been these last few years. You are going into her home; you are going to try to grow up like her, and so bring her back again to both of us. It is a very sacred undertaking.”

“But—oh, I can’t think, Daddy!” Elizabeth cried impetuously. “Let me go back to school, Daddy! I will grow

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up like her there. I will try so hard. I will—”

Mr. Churchill placed his hand firmly on his daughter's arm.

“We will not go over that again,” he said. “Take up your new life in that same spirit. You can make it very beautiful.”

“No! no! no!” sobbed Elizabeth.

Mr. Churchill went on, ignoring the girl's tears. They made it harder for him, but they did not weaken his determination.

“Treat Mrs. Trumbull kindly, and she will stay with you,” he said. “Treat her unkindly, and I'm very much afraid she will leave. In that case, you will not only have missed an opportunity to make a fine-souled woman your friend, but you will be left alone.”

“Alone? In that house alone?” exclaimed Elizabeth, looking up with startled eyes.

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“It rests with you as your whole life there rests with you. Remember that you enter that house as a little woman, not as a school-girl.”

“And all my friends—what will become of them?” gasped Elizabeth.

“The true friends will remain your true friends,” answered Mr. Churchill. “Here again you may do as you choose. Ask them to your house, entertain them as your means will allow. Your mother entertained a great deal. Accept their invitations as your time will permit.”

“How can I, with no clothes to wear?” asked Elizabeth.

“Your mother found it possible. Mrs. Trumbull will show you how to make them.”

“But that was a long time ago.”

“Men and women have not changed greatly *at heart* since then,” answered Mr. Churchill. “Nor have honest tastes changed. Fashions alter, but that which

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is really beautiful remains always beautiful. I doubt if your mother would have dressed to-day very differently from the way she dressed then."

"And the dancing-school and—"

"I should think you might have little dances of your own," her father suggested. "Your mother used to arrange the big room for such affairs."

Elizabeth's face brightened. This did not sound like such a bad idea. But how would she ever get dressed for such an occasion without Marie? And what would she dress herself in? No, it was all absurd and impossible. There would be no chef to prepare the spread, no orchestra, no anything! Oh, how she was to be pitied! The Brookfield girls would not come, anyway, if they knew she was doing her own work. And if they did come, it would be only to poke fun at her.

"I remember that on Hallowe'en

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nights, at Thanksgiving, and at Christmas, we used to have very gay times," Mr. Churchill continued. "I have never since seen so much merriment, heard gayer music, tasted such good things, seen more lovely women. And the fairest and most beautiful of them all was your mother."

He said this so sincerely and proudly that, for a second, Elizabeth caught the contagion of his enthusiasm. She heard the music and the laughter, saw the little rooms gaily adorned with green and scarlet, and pictured her mother the admired center of the happy throng.

"Oh," she cried, "if I could do that!"

"All that your mother had is still in the house," he said. "And all that is left on earth of her spirit is in you. I believe that with these you can bring back to the old home the old life. I believe you can, my girl."

He rested his hand upon her head.

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But the next second the vision faded before her eyes.

“I’m—I’m not like Mother,” she sobbed.

“Then make yourself like her,” said her father, gently.

For a second he clasped her in his arms, and then drew from his pocket an iron key. He handed her this.

“Here is the key to the house,” he said. “And may God be with you there as He was with your mother—dear little Lady of the Lane.”

Elizabeth felt her heart grow big. It was so that all her neighbors had called her mother. With a sudden passion of affection, she clung to her father’s neck, and kissed him again and again.



“Here is the key to the house,” he said.

V

THE HOUSE IN THE LANE

IT was the last day of May, when Elizabeth took possession of her new home. Though the exterior had been familiar to her all her life, the interior was an unknown world. Mr. Churchill had allowed no one to cross the threshold from the day he took his baby up to the big house which he had built for her mother. But many a time, late at night, he, himself, had gone back, thrown open the windows, and dusted about the house as best he could. Men used to wonder what relief he found from the steady grind of his work. It was this sacred task.

It was with some curiosity, then, that

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Elizabeth fitted the iron key into the lock, and opened the door. Behind her stood Mrs. Trumbull, and behind the latter, stood Martin, bearing a small steamer trunk on his shoulder.

Elizabeth stepped in. The house smelled sweet and fresh, though it seemed a little damp. She found herself in a hall, papered with a quaint design of roses, now faded, with stairs leading to the second story. Two doors opened out of it—one at the end, and one at the right. She opened the latter, and found herself in the main living-room. The side windows faced The Towers. The curtains were up, and the afternoon sun flooded into the room, making it look cheerful and bright. The shades, however, were faded, and blackened with dust, while the old carpet looked very odd to Elizabeth in contrast with the rich rugs at the other house. The furniture, too, was of a much simpler type than that which had

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surrounded her all her life. The first effect, in spite of the sunshine, was depressing to her. The room looked cold and barren. But, to Mrs. Trumbull it seemed far more homelike than the more luxurious quarters she had just left. She was at once all enthusiasm, though her delight was tempered with something of sadness, too. It seemed strange to find the house living on just the same after its mistress had gone.

“I declare! I can almost see your mother sitting here now,” choked Mrs. Trumbull.

Elizabeth shivered as she led the way into the next room. This was larger than the first, extending the whole width of the house. It had two windows on each side, those on the left being partly shielded by a lilac bush just beginning to blossom. Through the leaves one caught glimpses of a stretch of green fields, some five acres, which sloped in the direction

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of the city beyond. Like the front room, it had a low ceiling and was full of sunshine. It had been used as a dining-room, but now, with all the dishes packed away and nothing in sight but a bare table and an empty sideboard, it looked as cheerless as an attic. There was a cupboard in the recess below the stairs, which Elizabeth was quick to discover. She opened the door, but found it filled with nothing but old china. The dishes were dusty, and many of them were nicked and cracked. She had turned away from these, when Mrs. Trumbull came up. Nothing seemed to be too old or tawdry to excite an exclamation of delight from the latter.

“There!” she exclaimed, “I wondered whatever had become of that china. It belonged to your grandmother Randolph. She gave it to Mary as a wedding present. It must be seventy-five years old.”

“It looks more like a hundred and

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seventy-five," returned Elizabeth. "Still, it may do for the kitchen table."

"For the kitchen table!" snorted Mrs. Trumbull. "Your grandmother's china for the kitchen table?"

"I—I meant the cracked ones," answered Elizabeth, uneasily.

She had not looked at the collection as an heirloom, but merely as so many chipped dishes.

In one corner of the room was an old Franklin stove, rusty, and covered with cobwebs. It was another melancholy reminder of the past. Elizabeth hurried into the next room. This was the kitchen.

"Your mother used to keep it so clean here, you could eat off the floor!" exclaimed Mrs. Trumbull, "but lor! look at it now!"

A rusty stove stood on one side of the room, and an iron sink on another. Pots and kettles, tin dippers and pans, hung

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where they had been left, but they had gathered much dust. They had once been polished as brightly as mirrors, but now were dark and tarnished. Mrs. Trumbull crossed to a door which stood to the left of the sink, and swung it open.

“There’s plenty of wood here, Beth,” she announced, as she glanced in. “Do you want to build a fire in the kitchen stove before we go any farther?”

“No, thanks,” Elizabeth answered stubbornly.

“You’ll have to make one later on, if you have anything for supper,” said Mrs. Trumbull.

“I thought you’d get supper,” said Elizabeth.

“It would only be putting off your first lesson if I did,” answered Mrs. Trumbull. “You’ll never get ahead that way.”

Mrs. Trumbull caught sight of a barrel of flour and the other necessary materials for cooking.

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“I see he’s given you the things to do with,” she said. “We might have some hot biscuits for supper.”

For a moment, Elizabeth frowned at Mrs. Trumbull. Then she turned away.

“We will not have any supper,” she declared. “For all I care we’ll never have anything to eat!”

Elizabeth looked around for some way of escape. The one thing she wished now, was to be by herself. A flight of stairs led from the kitchen to the chambers above. She swiftly mounted these, and hurried to the front room which had been her mother’s. Here Mr. Churchill’s housekeeping efforts revealed some result. There was no dust to be seen, and everything was in order. Yet, in spite of this, the passing years had left their mark. The wall-paper, a cream-white with a faint design of blue, had faded, and the curtains had grown discolored with time. The floor was covered with

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straw matting and home-made rugs. A large four-poster bed stood in one corner, and, between the two front windows, there was a large bureau. The few simple toilet articles which were her mother's were there, even to a small pincushion still full of pins. A few queer, old pictures and an oval mirror completed the furnishings. In contrast with her chamber at The Towers, this room seemed to Elizabeth as bare of luxury as Lizette's.

The bed was not made up, but in the large closet near it, she found a camphor trunk filled with clean, white linen. That was all very well, but who was to spread the sheets, and put on the pillow-cases, and smooth out the wrinkles, as Marie had always done? Mrs. Trumbull, who came in at this moment, suggested an answer to that question.

“If I were you, my dear,” she said kindly, “I’d whisk those sheets out of the box and hang them up in the sun.”

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Elizabeth sank into a chair.

“Don’t tell me to do anything more,” she sighed. “I’m very tired.”

“Tired?” exclaimed Mrs. Trumbull. “What in the world have you done, so far, to make you tired?”

“The very thought of all these hateful things Daddy wishes me to do makes me tired.”

“That’s it exactly,” declared Mrs. Trumbull. “It’s the thought of them. Land alive! If you was to pitch in now and *do* them, it would n’t be half the work.”

“I can’t, and I won’t,” answered Elizabeth.

“Well, you can do as you please, of course,” answered Mrs. Trumbull, “but I know I’m going to have a clean, sweet bed to sleep in to-night. The expressman just brought my trunk, and I told him to put it in the next room. I s’pose you want me to sleep there?”

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“You may sleep anywhere you like.”

For an hour, Elizabeth sat by the window, tapping her boot against the floor, and planning what course she should pursue with Miss Grimshawe when she went back to school. She determined to be very polite, but very cold and distant. In the meanwhile, Mrs. Trumbull flitted in and out of the room, busy in arranging her things. It was almost four o'clock when she finished. With the sun creeping toward the horizon line, it became cooler, and it was this fact which turned her thoughts again to Elizabeth. She found the girl sitting by the window. The forlorn little figure disarmed her suspicion, and excited her sympathy. She crossed to the girl's side.

“Lor, child!” she exclaimed. “Why don't you fly round now, and get your things ready for the night?”

“I'm waiting for Daddy to come and get me,” faltered Elizabeth.

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Mrs. Trumbull drew a deep breath. She understood Spencer Churchill and his plans well enough to know that Elizabeth might as well put this thought out of her mind once for all. She also knew that it was quite useless to try to make the girl herself understand this. And something must be done.

"Look here, Beth," she broke out, "it does n't seem to me you 're showing much spirit."

Elizabeth looked up quickly.

Mrs. Trumbull was standing with her hands upon her hips, her black eyes snapping.

"What do you mean?" faltered Elizabeth.

"I mean it does n't show much spunk to sit down and wait for your dad to come for you. Why don't you *make* him come?"

"Make him come?" repeated Elizabeth, sitting up very straight.

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“That’s what your ma would do. She would n’t sit there helpless as a baby; she’d fix things up so cozy round here, he’d *want* to come. Land alive, child, if you go at it right, you can make him so sorry he is n’t living here, he ’ll be homesick.”

Here was a new idea.

“Make Dad sorry he is n’t living here?” she pondered.

“You can be sure of one thing, that if he saw the place now, he would n’t be sorry. The house is as cold as a barn, and there is n’t a single bite to eat. There are two things every man likes: fire and food. If I were you, I’d always have them in the house, waiting for him.”

“He’s probably toasting his back in front of an open fire this minute,” moaned Elizabeth, “and I am cold and hungry.”

“Bah!” exclaimed Mrs. Trumbull, “I ’ll bet he ’d rather be down here with us for



The shavings blazed up, filled the room with smoke, and went out

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all that, if it looked anywhere near cheerful."

"Dad would rather be here?"

"Of course he would."

"But it's so lonely and—"

"Lonely? I'll bet it's twice as lonely up in that big ark of a house."

"But there's nothing here."

"Nothing? There is everything. There's more of home in one of these rooms than in that whole place. Your mother would have made a king want to swap his palace to come down here. You can do it, too. If I was in your place, I would n't let a man stand with his back to the fire and laugh at me—not when I had such a chance as this. I'd fix things up so pretty, that he'd come to the door and beg to be let in."

Elizabeth sprang to her feet.

"If I could do that!" she exclaimed.

"Well, you can," replied Mrs. Trum-

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bull, "but it won't be by sitting in a chair and moping. I never yet saw a man who would n't run a mile to get away from a moper."

Without another word, Elizabeth turned, and ran down-stairs to the wood-shed. Here she gathered up an armful of shavings and kindling and rushed to the fireplace in the front room. She tossed in the wood and touched a match to it. The shavings blazed up for a moment, filled the room with smoke, and went out.

VI

MY LADY COOKS AN OMELET

NOTHING daunted by this failure, Elizabeth proceeded at once to the kitchen, and here Martin showed her how to build a fire, with so much kindly attention to details, that all she had to do was to touch a lighted match to the kindling. Then she picked up a cook-book as the first step toward preparing supper.

The chef always began his dinners with soup, but as she looked over the many recipes, she could not find one that did not call for some ingredient which she did not possess. Half the materials she had never heard of. Soup stock, for instance, seemed to be an essential of all soups. When she turned to the recipe for this,

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she was confronted with the following formula: six pounds of shin of beef, three quarts of cold water, one half teaspoon of peppercorns, six cloves, one half a bay-leaf, three sprigs of thyme, one sprig of marjoram, two sprigs of parsley, one half cup of carrot, one half cup of turnip, one half cup of onion, one half cup of celery. It sounded more like a prescription than a recipe. Moreover, it took from six to seven hours to cook it, and, when all was done, this was only the foundation of a soup.

She decided, therefore, that she must do without soup. She must begin with the next course—fish. But there was no recipe for the preparation of fish which did not demand, as an essential, a fish of some sort. She had no fish, and no way of getting one.

What then could she have? She turned to the menus at the back of the book. They fairly made her mouth

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water—oyster and macaroni croquettes; stuffed fillets of halibut with Hollandaise sauce; tomato jelly, spring lamb, and cheese soufflés, larded grouse; sultana roll—

She paused at this. If she had nothing but sultana roll, it might do very well for one meal. She turned back the pages to see how it was made. She read as follows:

Line a one-pound baking-powder box with pistachio ice-cream.

There was no need of going further. Where in the world was she to get pistachio ice-cream? One ought to live next door to a confectionery shop—between a confectionery shop and a baker shop—to prepare successfully such a delicacy as that.

Reluctantly, she passed over one after another of these tempting dishes. Yesterday, it would only have been necessary

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to confide to Marie in the morning that she felt a craving for this, that, or the other thing, and at night she would find it on the table.

The longer she studied the cook-book, the clearer it became to her that the best things she could have for supper were hot bread of some sort and eggs in some form. After much deliberation, she decided upon popovers and an omelet. She was very fond of both. In some fear lest she might be cheated of even these by a demand for marjoram or thyme, she turned to the recipes. Her heart was gladdened at once. They were absurdly simple, and called for nothing but flour, eggs, milk, and butter. All four articles stood on the table as though waiting for this very thing.

To make popovers, all one had to do was to mix a cup of flour with a bit of salt, add gradually a cup of milk and beaten yolk of an egg, fold in the beaten white,

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and bake twenty-five minutes in a hot oven. A girl must be a dunce, indeed, to need further instructions in so simple a matter. It was a great deal easier than fudge. According to the photograph of the finished product, which accompanied the recipe, they ought to be fully as good as the chef's.

Taking down the mixing bowl, she proceeded at once to her task. She intended to produce these delicious popovers as a surprise to Mrs. Trumbull, although the latter, by no means, deserved so fine a supper. Obeying instructions, she took an egg, and tried to crack the shell, in order to separate the yolk from the white. She used an iron spoon and went at it much as she would crack a walnut. At the first attempt, she crushed yolk, white, and shell into a single, slimy, yellow mess. Discarding this, she began again, and tapped the shell lightly. In this way she made a small hole, through which she

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tried to shake out the egg. When it finally came, it came yolk and all. She gave up all idea of trying to separate them, and turned them together into the bowl. If they were to be mixed in the end, she saw no reason why they should not be mixed at the beginning.

When Martin came in with the fresh milk, she delegated him to attend to the stove.

“I shall need a hot oven, Martin,” she informed him.

Martin looked with some curiosity at the batter Elizabeth was so briskly beating. She was spattering everything within two feet of the bowl, including herself. Even she, with all her faith, could not help wondering how so sticky a mixture could ever possibly develop into popovers. She found a gem pan, and buttered it according to instructions. She filled each little hollow, and then turned to Martin.

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“Have you a watch?” she demanded.

“Yes, miss.”

“What time is it, please?”

“Twenty minutes of six, miss.”

She made a hurried calculation. The popovers should come out at five minutes past six.

“Open the oven door, Martin.”

Martin obeyed. Elizabeth shoved in the pan, and closed the door as quickly as though she expected the popovers to jump out like frightened kittens.

“Now, Martin,” she ordered, “I want you to sit right there, with your watch in your hand, and let me know when it is five minutes past six.”

Though the order was peremptory, Martin hesitated. He had plenty of his own work yet to do in the barn.

“Perhaps if I was to come in a little after six,” he suggested.

“No,” Elizabeth objected at once, “I’m going to be very busy with the rest of the

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supper, and can't be bothered tending the fire."

"Very well," Martin submitted.

And so, watch in hand, he stood by the oven door. However, he kept one eye upon Elizabeth, eager to learn what the rest of the supper might be.

Elizabeth picked up her cook-book and turned to "Omelet." She discovered that there were many kinds to choose from. One might have an oyster omelet, an orange omelet, a jelly omelet, a bread omelet, a French omelet, an omelet with croûtons, an omelet à la Martin, a Spanish omelet, an omelet Robespierre, and, finally, a plain omelet. Obviously, a plain omelet was what she needed for supper. She briskly broke four eggs into the bowl, added salt, pepper, and milk, and mixed all these things together. This done, she faced Martin as though inviting criticism. The latter only murmured, staring at his



Elizabeth makes an omelet.

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watch as though he were timing a trotting horse.

“Ten minutes to a second, miss.”

“Very good,” she answered. “Everything will be ready at the same time.”

She put some butter into her frying-pan, and poured the mixture into it.

“This must cook slowly, Martin,” she informed him, as she placed it upon the stove.

Martin looked uncomfortable. If she were to thrust the responsibility of this second dish upon him, he didn’t know what he would do.

“I don’t understand anything about puddings, miss,” he hastened to explain to her.

“Who said anything about puddings?” Elizabeth demanded.

“I was afraid you were going to leave that—” He nodded toward the frying-pan.

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“That is a plain omelet,” she answered coldly. “When well puffed and delicately browned underneath,” she quoted from the cook-book as glibly as though it were the result of her own experience,—“when delicately browned underneath, you may place the pan on the center grate of the oven to finish cooking on top.”

It did not take the omelet more than two minutes to brown on the bottom. In fact, it not only browned, but burned, within that period. Elizabeth dragged it off, and nearly turned it upside down on the floor. She managed to save it, however, and with Martin’s help shoved it into the oven.

“Now,” she said determinedly, “I must freshen myself up.”

“You are n’t going?”

“I will be back in five minutes.”

Whereupon she disappeared, leaving Martin staring anxiously at his watch. He was not accustomed to such responsi-

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bility as this in the matter of dinner. The most he had ever been called upon to do in connection with the preparation of this meal, was to await the chef's signal that all was ready, and then convey this information from the kitchen to the drawing-room. No one could do that more expeditiously or with more dignity than he. He moved neither too rapidly nor too slowly; he spoke neither too gravely nor too flippantly. One guest had observed to Mr. Churchill that Martin's mere announcement was a sufficient voucher for a good dinner. Moreover, Martin made his distinctions: he did not announce breakfast as he did dinner; he did not announce a dinner for two as he did a dinner for twelve. All this is merely to show that, in his profession, Martin was a man of some standing, and that his handling of matters outside his own province should in no way reflect upon him. If the positions were reversed and the chef were

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told to announce one of his own dinners, see what a sorry botch *he* would make of it!

Two minutes passed, then three, then five. Still Elizabeth did not return. Another five minutes passed. A suspicious odor stole from the oven. Martin began to get excited as though timing a real horse-race; it was Elizabeth against the popovers, and the omelet against both of them. He was watching the second hand now. It galloped around the disk as nervously as a thoroughbred. One might have thought it was leaping two seconds in one, in its anxiety to put Martin in an awkward position. So three more minutes passed. With his watch in his left hand, his right hand outstretched toward the oven, he kept his eyes upon the kitchen door. The stove was becoming hotter every minute. Smoke began to steal from the oven in an ever-increasing volume. He was getting breathless.

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At this point Elizabeth reappeared, looking as unconcerned as though she had no part whatever, in this business.

“Quick, miss!” Martin panted. “We have only thirty seconds to spare.”

“That is very nice,” she nodded. “I will notify Mrs. Trumbull that supper is ready.”

“You are n’t going away again?” protested Martin.

“You may remove the things from the oven,” answered Elizabeth.

“Five seconds more,” Martin announced, with his hand outstretched toward the stove.

“Mrs. Trumbull!” Elizabeth called, “supper is ready.”

Martin swung open the door. A cloud of smoke rolled out. Nothing daunted, however, he seized a cloth, and removed the omelet. It was very brown; strictly speaking, it was black. He placed it on the floor, and grabbed the popovers.

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These, too, were very brown and very flat. They hadn't "popped" at all. He placed these on the floor beside the omelet. Elizabeth stared at them both. At that moment Mrs. Trumbull entered.

"Why the table is n't set!" she exclaimed.

"The table?" stammered Elizabeth.
"Have n't you done that?"

"There is n't a single thing on it. And those dishes will all have to be washed before we can eat from them."

Her eyes caught sight of the two pans on the floor. "What are those?" she inquired.

"Popovers and omelet," Elizabeth answered unhesitatingly.

If she hadn't made them according to directions, she would never have been able to name them herself. They resembled neither the description nor the photograph which accompanied the recipe in the cook-book.

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“Which is which?” inquired Mrs. Trumbull.

Disappointed and humiliated, Elizabeth felt her eyes fill. She turned away, half inclined to retreat up-stairs again. Mrs. Trumbull instantly grew sympathetic.

“You poor child!” she exclaimed. “You ought to have let me show you how.”

But Elizabeth shrank back. To be sympathized with only made her failure more marked. Without a word, she hurried into the dining-room. The bare table looked very forbidding. She brought a few plates, knives, forks, and spoons from the closet, and, coming back into the kitchen with them, washed and dried them. Then she proceeded to set them on the uncovered dining-room table. She dumped the omelet into one dish, and the popovers into another, and once again announced supper.

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Mrs. Trumbull seated herself opposite the girl, not knowing what to say or do. Elizabeth served her a portion of the omelet and a popover. Then, serving herself, she resolutely took a mouthful of the charred egg. She had all she could do to swallow it, but she managed it. Mrs. Trumbull, on the other hand, found it impossible to swallow even so much as a mouthful. Neither, however, made any comment. So they sat there for five long minutes, making as serious a pretense at eating as two children over their mud-pies. Then Elizabeth inquired politely:

“You are quite through, Mrs. Trumbull?”

It was difficult to see how one could be through without having begun, but Mrs. Trumbull answered quietly: “Yes, Beth.”

Elizabeth arose, and carried what was left of the supper into the kitchen for Martin.

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"I'm very tired, Martin," she informed him. "Can you set your own table to-night?"

"Yes, indeed, miss," he answered quickly. "And I think you have done very well, miss, for the first day."

The praise was too much for Elizabeth. She caught her breath, with a sob.

"Oh, I've done horribly,—and I've really tried,—and you'll starve to death if you stay here."

"There, miss, there," Martin answered. "I'll do very well. Why, there's a lot left here for me!"

That was literally true. Except for the single mouthful Elizabeth had forced down, it was *all* left. Elizabeth hurried to the back stairway and ran up to her room as fast as she could. Closing the door of her room behind her, she threw herself upon the bed.

For a moment, Martin blinked after her, then he drew himself up to the kitchen

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table, and resolutely sat down before the cold, burned omelet and the flint-like coals which should have been popovers. With an effort, he choked down six mouthfuls of the former and one of the latter. Then, with as great a show of satisfaction as though he had made a full meal, he shoved back his chair. He stared wistfully a moment at the dishes. He would have liked to wash them, but he did not dare. With a sigh, he went out to the barn to complete his chores.

A half-hour later, Martin returned to the big house, where he was still to occupy his old room. As he entered the kitchen, he found Lizette and the other girls just about to eat their dinner. In front of them was a fine roast of beef surrounded with vegetables. Martin's mouth began to water. "Is it that you have dined?" inquired the chef, hospitably.

Martin swallowed hard.

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“Yes, thank you,” he answered firmly.

“Perhaps you can dine some more, eh?” persisted the chef.

“Not another mouthful,” answered Martin.

“Then,” decided the chef with a jealous leer, “it is not Miss Elizabeth who is the cook, eh?”

“Oh, yes,” answered Martin, “Miss Elizabeth cooked the dinner.”

“And you had?”

“Hot popovers and an omelet,” replied Martin.

Then he made his escape as soon as possible to avoid further questioning. There was a look in the chef’s eye which he did not like.

VII

MY LADY RECEIVES

ELIZABETH awoke the next morning with her cheeks flushed at memory of her failure in the kitchen the night before. But she also awoke decidedly hungry. For a little while, it was a struggle for mastery between her pride and her appetite, but by the time she was dressed, the latter had conquered. When Mrs. Trumbull repeated her offer to go down with her into the kitchen and show her how to prepare the breakfast, Elizabeth accepted with a meek, "Thank you." As a result, they all had a very satisfactory meal.

This meekness lasted for the next two days, very much to Mrs. Trumbull's sur-

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prise, and not a little to her discomfiture. In this mood, Elizabeth did not seem herself. When, on the third morning, Elizabeth came down-stairs early and without assistance actually began to prepare the breakfast, Mrs. Trumbull grew serious.

“Beth,” she asked gently, “are you sleeping well?”

“Very well, thank you,” answered Elizabeth.

“And there don’t appear to be anything wrong with your appetite,” Mrs. Trumbull added to herself. Then she said aloud: “Is n’t there something else I can show you about?”

“Nothing at all, thank you,” Elizabeth assured her.

“Well,” sighed Mrs. Trumbull, “I s’pose time will tell.”

She did not explain what she expected time to tell, but her prophecy was fulfilled immediately after breakfast. Elizabeth

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rose from the table with the calm announcement:

“I’m going up-stairs now to read.”

“Read? In the morning?” gasped Mrs. Trumbull, holding up her hands in horror.

“Why not?” asked Elizabeth.

“Because this whole house needs sweeping, for one thing,” Mrs. Trumbull answered promptly. Whatever worry she had had about the girl vanished instantly.

“I don’t care if it does,” retorted Elizabeth. “I’ve done my best, and it’s no use. I’ve washed dishes from morning until night, and there are always just as many the next day. I’ve dusted until I’m tired of dusting, and there’s no use in doing it, for the dust comes right back again.”

It was clear from the expression in Mrs. Trumbull’s eyes, that, as usual, she had a ready explanation for this phenomenon on the tip of her tongue, but before

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she could give utterance to it, Elizabeth flounced out of the door. She hurried up the back stairs to her room, and, finding a comfortable seat in the sun, picked up her book with a new relish. Here she remained for at least two hours, lazily reading and dozing with the utmost satisfaction. She was uninterrupted until Mrs. Trumbull came in.

“There are some girls waiting in the sitting-room to see you,” she announced.

Elizabeth jumped to her feet.

“To see me!” she exclaimed. “Did they send up their cards?”

“I did n’t wait for any,” answered Mrs. Trumbull.

Elizabeth was breathless. If these were the Brookfield girls, or Nan, or—oh, it did not matter who it was! They had come on purpose to embarrass her. She stamped her foot indignantly.

“Tell them I’m not at home!” she exclaimed.

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“I won’t,” Mrs. Trumbull answered abruptly. “I would n’t tell any one what is n’t true, even for Mary Churchill’s daughter.”

“Tell them I *can’t* see them. Tell them I *won’t* see them,” stormed Elizabeth.

“No, Beth,” answered Mrs. Trumbull, “I ’ll do nothing of the kind. The room does n’t look as well as it might, but it is n’t anything to be ashamed of.”

“It ’s horrible!” gasped Elizabeth. “And so am I. Look at me.”

“Well, if folks come in the morning, they must expect to find you in your work clothes.”

“That ’s it—work clothes! They ’d never stop laughing at me!”

“What would they laugh at?”

“At my being sent over to this little house—at my having to do my own work. Oh, they ’d laugh at everything!”

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“If I was you, I would n’t let them laugh,” declared Mrs. Trumbull.

“How can I help it?”

“By not being ashamed of these things yourself,” answered Mrs. Trumbull. “I don’t like to see you this way, Beth. You are n’t doing anything but what your mother did. You can’t be ashamed of that. Go down just as you are. Hold your head high, and don’t apologize for a single thing.”

“Oh!” gasped Elizabeth.

Mrs. Trumbull placed her hand gently upon the girl’s shoulder.

“To have had such a mother as yours, is reason enough for any girl to hold her head high in any company,” she said.

Elizabeth took a quick breath. Then she clenched her fists.

“I ’ll go,” she said. “And they shan’t dare laugh at me.”

As Elizabeth came down-stairs, she

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heard the voices in the front room, and knew that her worst fears were realized —it was Jane and Helen Brookfield. These girls, though ranking low in their class work, were the recognized leaders of the school in matters of fashion. They were always the first to appear in gowns patterned as nearly in the latest style as was possible for young ladies of seventeen. Both were very pretty. To-day being Saturday, they had probably dropped in while riding by.

At the foot of the stairs, Elizabeth paused to catch her breath. She had heard what an ordeal it was to be presented at court, but she felt now that she could face all the crowned heads of Europe more easily than these two school-mates. She knew her cheeks were scarlet, and she feared that her knees would give way. Standing outside a second, she heard their whispers and suppressed giggles. It was certainly rude of them

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to come to her house and laugh, no matter what they might think of it. She entered the room with her head well up and her hand outstretched.

“Why, how do you do, Helen? And you too, Jane? It was kind of you to come.”

Her voice was affected, but she carried herself so well as to leave the girls a bit confused, in fear lest they had been overheard. Jane was the first to recover.

“We called at The Towers—” she faltered.

“And they told you I had moved?” cut in Elizabeth, helping the visitor over her hesitation. “It’s true. Won’t you sit down?”

The sisters seated themselves upon the dusty horsehair sofa to the right of the fireplace, and Elizabeth drew her mother’s rocking-chair to a position in front of them. She wished heartily enough now that, instead of reading after breakfast,

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she had followed Mrs. Trumbull's advice and dusted. She was sure Helen was noting every speck of dirt, and, truth to tell, there was plenty to be seen.

"All sorts of stories are going around school about you!" exclaimed Helen.

She was slight and dark, with pretty, red cheeks and a childlike way of saying unkind things and asking forgiveness with her innocent eyes the minute they were spoken.

"Really?" laughed Elizabeth. "Tell me some of them."

"They say Miss Grimshawe would n't let you come back."

"That is true," answered Elizabeth, with an effort.

"And that your father was very angry with you."

"What did *you* say?" inquired Elizabeth.

"Why, we did n't know what to say; did we, Jane?"

The visitors seated themselves upon the sofa.



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“No,” answered Jane, mildly. She was examining every shred of Elizabeth’s costume.

“And,” ran on Helen, “they said you were to be shut up in a little old house.”

“To live in my mother’s house,” Elizabeth corrected.

“Oh,” murmured Jane, “and was *this* your mother’s house?”

The way she said it made Elizabeth wince.

“Mother came here when she was first married,” Elizabeth explained.

“Really?” giggled Helen. “Why, we thought it was the servants’ quarters; didn’t we, Jane?”

“It was stupid of us,” apologized Jane.

“Surely you are never stupid, Jane,” answered Elizabeth.

Jane sat up a bit more rigidly. She knew her shortcomings. Helen, not knowing hers as well, smiled complacently.

“Of course that was a long while ago,

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when every one around here lived in cozy little houses of their own," added Elizabeth.

"I 'm quite sure my mama did n't," objected Helen, sweetly. "Did she, Jane?"

"Mama has always preferred apartments," answered Jane. "She has lived at the Belvidere ever since she was married."

"Apartments are so hotelly, don't you think?" returned Elizabeth.

"Mama says they save so much bother with servants," answered Helen. "I suppose you brought your maids down with you from The Towers?"

Elizabeth twisted uneasily. She wondered just how much these girls had learned. But she braced herself to the unvarnished truth.

"No, I did n't bring any servants at all."

"No servants!" exclaimed Helen. "Then who is to do the work?"

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“I am,” answered Elizabeth.

“You?”

Elizabeth nodded.

“The cooking and dusting and—every-
thing?”

“Everything except milk the cow,”
laughed Elizabeth.

Now that she was in for it, she rather
enjoyed making things as black as possi-
ble.

“When I get settled down, I may do
even that,” she added.

“Why, that—that is awful; is n’t it,
Jane?” exclaimed Helen.

“It ’s much worse than any of the girls
dreamed,” answered Jane.

“It ’s like—why, it ’s like being shut up
in prison,” suggested Helen.

“To have a house of your own to do
with as you please?” demanded Elizabeth.
“I should call it a good deal more like
prison to have to march up to Miss Grim-
shawe’s every morning, and sit in two or

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three stuffy rooms until the middle of the afternoon. I don't have any one here to tell me to do this or that. I can do as I please."

In trying to make the situation as attractive as possible to her visitors, Elizabeth found herself unconsciously making it attractive to herself. She had not until this moment appreciated the real liberty she was enjoying. Before, she had looked at it from the point of view of the boarding-school. Viewing it now as an outsider, it appeared quite different. She warmed up to her subject even more as she ran on.

"I'd rather take orders from myself," she said, "than from Miss Grimshawe. And I'd rather do a problem from a cook-book than an arithmetic. And I'd as soon wipe dishes as blackboards."

Elizabeth found herself getting excited. She paused a moment to catch her breath.

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“How funny!” cooed Helen. “And can you learn French and singing in the kitchen?”

“Can you learn them at school?” retorted Elizabeth.

“I’m sure I did very well with my irregular verbs last week, didn’t I, Jane?”

“And Miss Santier said I might have a very good voice if I practised long enough, didn’t she, Helen?” returned Jane.

Elizabeth smiled. Jane Brookfield’s voice was the joke of the school.

“Well,” said Elizabeth, “I can take singing lessons in the kitchen if I can’t French.”

“From whom?” inquired Helen, her big, blue eyes wide with wonder.

“From the tea-kettle,” answered Elizabeth. “You ought to have heard it sing this morning. It trilled and gurgled while I was getting breakfast, for all the

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world like Miss Santier in one of her Italian songs."

"You don't mean to say you prepared breakfast yourself?" exclaimed Helen.

"Who else would get it?" asked Elizabeth.

"The person who opened the door and would n't wait for our cards," suggested Jane.

"I guess you 'd go hungry if you waited for her to do things for you," laughed Elizabeth. "But she showed me how. I learned to make biscuits yesterday."

"She 's your governess then?" inquired Helen.

"No. She 's just my friend," answered Elizabeth.

Jane glanced significantly at Helen. It was a very superior sort of glance. It did not escape Elizabeth. But, if it was meant to embarrass her for having acknowledged such a woman to be her friend, it failed of its purpose. She felt

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more kindly disposed toward Mrs. Trumbull after that than she had at any time since the latter's arrival.

"You must meet her," said Elizabeth, sweetly.

Helen rose instantly.

"I think we must be going; must n't we, Jane?" she said quickly.

"I'd ask you to stay longer if I were settled," said Elizabeth, politely. "Perhaps by and by you can come for the day."

"We only dropped in to see what had become of you," Helen responded. "I suppose you 'll be at the dancing class this afternoon?"

Elizabeth had forgotten all about the dancing class. For a moment she looked a bit wistful. Then she put it out of her mind.

"No," she answered, "I shall be too busy."

"Why, Beth!" exclaimed Helen. "Shan't you be able to get out at all?"

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“Perhaps—later on. As soon as I’m able, I want some of my old friends to come here to tea.”

“That is sweet of you,” answered Helen. “But of course we are very busy also; are n’t we, Jane?”

“We are going to join a tennis class, nodded Jane.

“I don’t see how you will find time for that,” murmured Elizabeth.

The two girls moved rather hurriedly toward the door. They had intended to make Elizabeth uncomfortable, and, to tell the truth, they were becoming uncomfortable themselves. They had never seen Elizabeth so cool and self-possessed.

A groom was waiting outside, holding their horses. He touched his hat, and cantered to the door. The girls hastily mounted.

“Good-by,” Elizabeth called to them as they started off. “You ’ll tell every one the news, won’t you?”

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She came in, and closed the door behind her with a vicious bang.

“There!” she said to herself, “those are the last girls who get in here until this house is in order. They can say what they like, and I don’t care.”

“Company gone?” inquired Mrs. Trumbull from up-stairs.

“Those Brookfield girls have gone, if that’s what you mean,” replied Elizabeth.

Mrs. Trumbull came down.

“I saw them galloping off with that monkey trailing along behind them,” she commented.

“Before they go home, they ’ll visit half the girls in school and tell them I ’m living in a barn and doing my own work!” exclaimed Elizabeth.

“What do you care?” asked Mrs. Trumbull.

“I don’t care,” snapped Elizabeth.

VIII

MY LADY RECEIVES AGAIN

“**I**F I were you,” declared Mrs. Trumbull that Saturday afternoon, “I’d make some doughnuts to-day. It’s time you learned how, and it will give us something in the house for over Sunday.”

Mrs. Trumbull had introduced the subject of doughnuts several times before, but without much success. This time, however, Elizabeth followed her, though somewhat reluctantly, into the kitchen and took down the yellow mixing bowl. She mixed the doughnuts a good deal after the fashion that she had built the first fire; she looked on until it was time to drop the little circles of dough into the fat. After Mrs. Trumbull had cooked

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the first half-dozen, however, she turned the business wholly over to Elizabeth. It was a distinctly hot operation, and the latter's cheeks soon became a flaming red. Moreover, it was not easy to land the sticky circles in the smoking kettle without getting spattered. She improved with practice, until, finally, she did not jump back more than a few inches.

"I declare!" exclaimed Mrs. Trumbull, as she studied the girl, dressed in a long, blue apron, and armed with a two-tined fork, "you look more like your ma this very minute than I've ever seen you look!"

"I feel more like her than I've ever felt," laughed Elizabeth.

"Now that I remember it, your ma used to have a curl like yours that was always getting loose and hanging over one ear."

"I expect I look very untidy," answered Elizabeth. "I'm glad there's no one else here now to see me."

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There was a knock at the door, and Elizabeth, thinking it the grocer, crossed the room and swung it open, the iron fork still in her hand. Before her, hat in hand, stood Roy Thornton. Tall and straight, dressed in a long automobile coat, his hands gauntleted in leather gloves, he stared in silence at Elizabeth, as much astonished as she was herself. There was not a boy in all the world she would not rather have seen at that moment. Elizabeth shrank back in confusion, but he met her eyes frankly. Then he laughed with an open-hearted amusement that, somehow, did not hurt.

“I beg your pardon,” he apologized. “I didn’t mean to intrude. I rapped at the front door, and then Helen Brookfield suggested I try this one.”

“What do you want?” stammered Elizabeth, not very politely.

“Mother and Helen have gone on in the machine to do some errands. They’ll

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soon be back," he explained, "and we thought you might like to join us then in a little spin."

"Thank you," Elizabeth managed to recover sufficiently to answer, "but I can't."

"I didn't know you were so busy," he said. "I didn't mean to interrupt you."

"It isn't your fault," she answered.

He peered into the kitchen.

"My," he said, "those doughnuts smell good!"

The exclamation was so unaffected, so boyish, that Elizabeth's embarrassment vanished at once.

"They are my first," she answered impulsively. "Would you like one?"

"Would I!" he said, "I'm nearly starved!"

"Will—will you come in?"

He accepted the invitation instantly. Elizabeth stammered some sort of an introduction to Mrs. Trumbull, and Thornton bowed as gallantly as to a lady in silks.

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Elizabeth handed him a fresh doughnut upon the end of her fork. He took a bite. She waited breathlessly.

“Oh, say,” he cried, “but these are fine! And you made them!”

Seated on the corner of the kitchen table, Roy Thornton contentedly munched his doughnut. Elizabeth regarded with pride every mouthful that he swallowed.

“I have n’t had a doughnut like this,” he said, “since Phil Harden, Bob Wенham, and I took a walking trip through the White Mountains. We used to stop at farm-houses, and buy milk and bread, and doughnuts like these. My, but they tasted good! I wonder why you can’t get such things in the city.”

“I can tell you,” answered Mrs. Trumbull. “It’s because city women don’t get up early enough in the morning.”

“Maybe that’s it,” he agreed. “Would you think me very impolite if I asked for another?”

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“Lor, have all you want,” answered Mrs. Trumbull. “I pity a boy who does n’t live within reach of a doughnut jar.”

He helped himself to a second one, which he ate with as much evident relish as the first.

Elizabeth attempted, unobserved, to sweep back into place the curl which was hanging over her left ear. But it would n’t stay. Then she tried her best to think of some excuse which would allow her to get out of the kitchen long enough to tidy up a bit. Thornton looked so immaculate, that he made the contrast with her own appearance even more marked. And yet she felt that he himself was not making any such comparison. Apparently he did not notice at all her gingham apron and her floury fingers.

“I tell you what!” he exclaimed, when he had finished his second doughnut, “I

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guess I'll have to learn to make these things myself."

"It would n't hurt you none," declared Mrs. Trumbull. "If I had a boy, I'd teach him to cook the same's I would a girl."

"I can make coffee and fry bacon," he boasted. "Even that much comes in handy in the woods."

"I guess California would never have been settled, if the men who went West in '49 had depended upon women to do their cooking for them," declared Mrs. Trumbull.

"You're right," agreed Thornton, "and even our modern woodsmen know how to cook. I'll never forget the biscuits old Peter Cooley used to make. Can you make biscuits, too?" he inquired, turning to Elizabeth.

"I made some this morning," she answered proudly.

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“I ’ll bet they were good. Helen said you were going to live here right along now and keep house.”

“Yes,” Elizabeth answered.

“What luck! It ’s like camping out!”

There was something in the way he said this that made her feel that she really was lucky. He gave a color of romance to her position.

“You make me feel as though summer vacation had come and I was tramping through the hills again,” he declared. “I ’d like to do some farm work. You don’t want to hire a man, do you?” he asked laughingly.

“You might have Martin’s place, if he leaves,” she answered.

“Martin? Is n’t he the grand duke who used to meet me at the door?”

“Yes,” she chuckled, “but now he ’s the milkman. I have a cow, you know.”

“A cow? And Martin is milking it?

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That ought to be a sight worth seeing. But, honestly, I would n't mind doing even that."

"I guess *you'd* be a sight worth seeing, if you tried it," returned Elizabeth.

Mrs. Trumbull began to worry about the rest of the doughnuts which were still to be fried.

"You'd better get the rest of your dough into the fat," she suggested.

Elizabeth could have dropped through the floor. It was one thing to let Roy Thornton see the finished product, and another to allow him to watch her actually at work. She began to wish he would take his departure.

"Won't the rest of the dough keep until to-morrow?" she asked.

"Land, child, no. It would fall flatter than a pancake."

Elizabeth unwillingly crossed the room and cut out four more doughnuts. As she returned with them in the flat of her

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hand, Roy sprang to his feet, throwing aside his gloves and long coat.

“Oh, say!” he pleaded, “won’t you let me do one?”

“You ’ll get your clothes all spotted,” Mrs. Trumbull warned him.

“I ’ll be careful,” he answered.

He took a doughnut from Elizabeth, and started toward the hot fat with it. But Mrs. Trumbull stopped him.

“Wait a minute,” she said. “If you ’re bound to do it, you must put on an apron first.”

She whipped off Elizabeth’s blue gingham apron, and adjusted it about Roy’s neck. He stood very straight and stiff while she was doing it. You would have thought to look at him that he was undergoing some sort of an operation. In the meanwhile, the doughnuts began to stick to his fingers, and the more he struggled the worse they stuck, until, in desperation, he held out his hands toward Elizabeth.

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“I’m afraid I’m making an awful mess of it,” he apologized.

“That’s because you did n’t flour your hands,” explained Mrs. Trumbull.

She took a knife and scraped off the dough, and then led him to the bread board, while Elizabeth stood by, convulsed with laughter.

“Now you begin again,” said Mrs. Trumbull.

“It is n’t as easy as it looks, is it?” commented Thornton.

Still he was not one to retreat after undertaking a task. He plunged his hands into the sifter full of flour, and washed them as vigorously as though he were using soap.

“That’s enough,” Mrs. Trumbull interrupted him. “Now lay the doughnut flat on your palm and just let it slide off into the fat.”

He obeyed the first part of her instructions, and crossed the room with his arm

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outstretched, as though to balance the doughnut in his hand were some delicate feat of juggling. When he reached the kettle, he slanted down his hand, and the bit of dough rolled off and stuck the hot fat, much as a bullfrog flops into a pool. The result was that his hand was generously spattered. But he didn't wince. He took that to be part of the sport.

"Now what do you do—poke it?" he inquired, as he watched it bob to the surface, after he had thought it gone forever.

"You let it alone, and put in another," answered Mrs. Trumbull. "And don't drop it in as though it were a rock; let it go in slanting, as though you were diving."

"Oh, that's the trick!" he answered.
"Well, now just you watch this one!"

He lowered it carefully, worked it along toward the ends of his fingers, and let go of it at a slant. It slid in without making a ripple.

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“How’s that?” he asked Elizabeth, as eagerly as though he had accomplished an amazing high dive.

“That’s fine,” she complimented him. “Now, when they look brown in the middle, you turn them over.”

She did n’t wish to appear to be merely an interested bystander. She wished to show some knowledge of the art. She found the fork, and, standing by his side, watched with him the little floating circles of dough as critically as though she were an expert.

“Now!” she ordered.

He seized the fork and turned them over.

“How’s that?” he demanded.

“Good,” answered Elizabeth.

“Give me a little practice, and I ’ll bet I could even make them,” he declared eagerly. “When I get home—”

There was another rap at the kitchen door. All three turned in that direction.

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“Jove!” exclaimed Thornton, “that’s Mother! I forgot all about her.”

Elizabeth could not have opened that door if it had been to save her life. As for Thornton, he was far too busy. Mrs. Trumbull solved the difficulty by going herself. When she swung the door open, she saw a woman of about fifty, and, peering over the latter’s shoulder, the same young lady who had asked her to carry her card up-stairs. There was an awkward pause for a second, as Mrs. Trumbull stared, somewhat aggressively, at the two. Then Thornton stepped forward. His mother showed some astonishment at finding him garbed in a blue gingham apron. As for Helen Brookfield, she could n’t believe her eyes. Her gaze was almost scornful.

“Mrs. Trumbull, this is my mother and Miss Brookfield.” He introduced them without embarrassment. “Excuse me, Mother, but I can’t leave my doughnuts.”

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Elizabeth managed somehow to step forward, and invite the visitors to come in.

"Well, Roy," exclaimed Mrs. Thornton, "what shall I find you doing next!"

"Making biscuits," answered Roy, without hesitation. "I'm going to learn how to cook."

Mrs. Thornton seated herself in a wooden chair and watched the proceedings. It was surprise enough to find Elizabeth Churchill in the kitchen.

As for Helen, she lifted her skirts with some ostentation as she came in, as if she feared to soil them on the kitchen floor.

"It's my fault that Roy has kept you waiting," Elizabeth apologized to Mrs. Thornton. "But I would n't have let him in—if I'd seen him first."

"I don't wonder that he came in after seeing you," chirped up Helen. "It's quite a curiosity to find you cooking, Beth."

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Mrs. Trumbull glanced up sharply.

"I guess it's quite a curiosity to find girls of to-day doing anything useful," she said.

Mrs. Thornton raised her eyebrows with a smile, as she glanced at Elizabeth. It was a kindly smile, and took some of the sting out of Helen's cutting remark.

"I'm sure there must be something at fault with the young girls, when the boys take to cooking," observed Mrs. Thornton, turning to Mrs. Trumbull.

"Here, Beth," Roy broke in, "see if these are ready to come out."

Elizabeth stepped to his side, and looked critically at the brown disks.

"I—I guess they're done," she stammered, turning for support to Mrs. Trumbull. The latter nodded.

Leaving Roy to wield the two-tined fork, Elizabeth hurried to the china closet and brought back some plates for her guests. Mrs. Thornton removed her

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gloves, and accepted one with murmured thanks, still watching her son. Then her eyes caught the design on the plate before her.

“Why, Elizabeth!” she exclaimed. “Where in the world did you get this?”

“Oh,” apologized Elizabeth in confusion, “it’s cracked, is n’t it? I did n’t notice. I have n’t had time yet to throw away the old ones.”

“Throw them away!” gasped Mrs. Thornton.

She was noting the marks on the back. The collecting of old china was a hobby of hers.

“Why!” she exclaimed, looking up, “don’t you realize that, besides being very beautiful, this old plate is very valuable? It is one of the historical designs. You have n’t more of them, have you?”

“More!” answered Elizabeth; “there’s a whole closet full.”

“It belonged to her great-grand-



Elizabeth looked critically at the brown disks

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mother," explained Mrs. Trumbull. "And if I do say it, I'd rather have it, cracked as it is, than a houseful of the stuff people buy to-day."

"I'd like very much to see the rest of it," said Mrs. Thornton.

"How's your doughnut?" demanded Roy.

Mrs. Thornton took a bite, and answered, absent-mindedly, "Very good, Roy."

But her eyes were turned wistfully toward the room from which the plate had been brought. Elizabeth trembled lest she might insist upon going in there. She would die of shame if Mrs. Thornton saw that room in its present condition.

"I—I will get some others for you," said Elizabeth.

"Allow me," begged Roy, following behind her.

"No," she refused quickly, "you tend to your cooking."

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She disappeared and closed the door behind her. She seized a cup and saucer and three or four plates at random and ran back. She laid the plates carelessly on the table beside Mrs. Thornton.

“Gently, child, gently!” exclaimed the latter.

Helen stepped forward, feeling obliged to show some interest in a matter which seemed so to excite Roy’s mother.

“They do look old, don’t they?” she murmured, in a tone that called attention to nothing but the nicks and cracks.

“How beautifully they did everything a hundred years ago!” exclaimed Mrs. Thornton. “See the color, see the design around the edge!”

She looked up with a little sigh.

“My dear,” she said, “I envy you.”

“Have you seen the new Limoges at Stratton’s?” inquired Helen.

“Don’t mention Limoges in the same breath with this,” protested Mrs. Thorn-

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ton. "There is n't a dealer in New York who would n't exchange a full set of that for a half-dozen of these plates."

"No, I suppose not," Helen hastened to agree. "I suppose this is quite a curiosity. Would they put it in a museum?"

Mrs. Thornton rose without deigning to reply. She turned to Elizabeth.

"You will show me the rest of it some day?" she pleaded.

"Some day," answered Elizabeth, quickly.

Thornton removed his apron, and put on his long coat and gloves again.

"I 'm sorry you can't go with us," he said, with evident sincerity, to Elizabeth. "But I 'll come around some afternoon for both you and Mrs. Trumbull. May I?"

"I don't know about me," answered Mrs. Trumbull. "I never rode in one of those things in my life."

"Then it 's time you did," laughed Thornton.

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In another minute they had all gone. Elizabeth sank into a chair.

“Well,” she gasped, “what do you think of that?”

“I liked the boy and his mother,” answered Mrs. Trumbull, who evidently saw nothing unusual in the fact that they had been received in the kitchen, “but I consider that Helen Brookfield a saucy little minx.”

“It was she who sent them all in here. She did it on purpose,” explained Elizabeth.

“Much good it did her,” snapped Mrs. Trumbull. “And do you know, I don’t believe that boy gets enough to eat.”

IX

AN INVITATION

BY the end of that week, the little house by the lane was every whit as spotless as The Towers, with its corps of servants. The woodwork had been scrubbed, the closets cleaned out, all the china taken down, washed, and put back again, and the windows polished both inside and out. Martin had been allowed to help in this work, by special permission of Mr. Churchill, and Mrs. Trumbull had helped without his permission. She told him frankly that she could n't sit still, with her hands folded, when anything like this was going on. During this campaign, Elizabeth also attended to her regular duties. A week before, this would have seemed to

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her an utter impossibility; and yet, though she had gone to bed every night at half-past seven thoroughly tired out, she was not conscious of having made any great effort. She always slept soundly until daylight, and, before she knew it, bedtime had come again. The days had never sped so swiftly. It was as though the twenty-four hours had suddenly been shortened to twelve. She had no time to pause and ask herself whether she was working hard or not. She had no time to pause and wonder what the Brookfield girls would think of her. And, strange to say, she had never in her life felt more light-hearted, and often found herself singing as she went about the house.

On Sunday morning, her father took both her and Mrs. Trumbull to church. After the service, he surprised them with an invitation to dinner, but this did not excite Elizabeth as much as one might

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have expected. She had already planned her own dinner, and, in fact, had set the table that morning before leaving. A certain amount of pride entered into the matter also. She refused to allow her father to consider such an invitation as an especial favor.

She held her head a little higher than usual as she answered, "Thank you, Daddy, but I don't think I shall be able to come to-day."

It was Mr. Churchill's turn to be surprised. He glanced at her swiftly with something like a frown. Elizabeth flushed. Mrs. Trumbull watched the two with interest. The latter had realized clearly enough during this last week, that in rousing the mother's energy in the daughter, the father was also awakening some of her other traits.

Mr. Churchill studied his daughter keenly for a second, and then he could not help but smile, while his eyes twinkled.

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“Very well, if you think it best,” he answered quietly.

Elizabeth hesitated a moment, in fear now that she had hurt him. Then she said, gently slipping her hand in his:

“When I am settled, Daddy, I shall have more time.”

Her father turned to Mrs. Trumbull, whose eyes were sparkling with unconcealed delight. Once again the shadow of a smile played about Mr. Churchill’s tense lips, and he turned away.

During the week, the garden had been plowed and harrowed and dressed. On Monday, Martin announced that he ought to begin planting early that morning.

“Mr. Churchill has sent down all kinds of seeds, miss,” he explained, “but he said you would tell me what we should plant.”

“Plant them all,” Elizabeth decided instantly.

“Lor, it would take a ten-acre field to do that,” answered Martin.

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“Well,” said Elizabeth, “I shall be very busy to-day. Can you wait until afternoon?”

Martin answered that he could.

Immediately after luncheon, she found him waiting for her. She put on a sunbonnet and an old pair of gloves, and followed him to the big square of upturned earth. Mrs. Trumbull went with them. Martin had a small basket filled with packages and bags. Each little envelop had a colored print upon it of the succulent and tempting vegetable which was supposed to grow from the seeds it contained. But Elizabeth shook her head wisely as she looked them over.

“I’ve seen pictures like these in the cook-book,” she commented. “They don’t really come out this way, you know.”

“The land is very rich,” put in Martin, who, with greater experience, had more faith than she.

“You will learn, Martin,” she returned,

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with a very superior air. "Now what do you want me to do?"

"If you 'll just tell me what you want planted," he answered, as though that was all she need have to do with it.

"I 'd try a little of everything," she declared.

But here Mrs. Trumbull came up with the wisdom of experience gained through many years.

"You want to plant mostly corn, for your chickens and the cow," she advised.

"But this garden is n't for the barn-yard," protested Elizabeth.

"There 'll be enough left over for us," Mrs. Trumbull explained. "We 'll get most of it back, anyway, in eggs and milk. I 'd sow half of this piece, anyhow, in corn."

"All right," agreed Elizabeth.

"Then you want a good patch of potatoes."

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“Of course! I ought to have thought of that!”

“Then you can save one corner for garden sass.”

“What is ‘garden sass’?” inquired Elizabeth.

“Peas and beans and lettuce and radishes and such stuff.”

And so, in less than ten minutes, Mrs. Trumbull had the field all planned out, and Martin, with his hoe, had gone to the farther side to make the hills for the corn.

“Why don’t you plant the garden sass yourself, and have it for all your own?” asked Mrs. Trumbull.

“I don’t know how,” confessed Elizabeth, who was beginning to feel ashamed at the number of times she had to admit her ignorance to Mrs. Trumbull. This new idea rather pleased her. She had always been fond of caring for the flowers in the conservatory, though about all she

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ever did was to pick off the dead leaves and notify the gardener when she found any bugs.

“Lor, child! it’s easy enough,” said Mrs. Trumbull. “Pick up that rake and trowel, and we’ll do it now.”

Elizabeth took the rake, and, while Martin busied himself upon the farther end of the field, they prepared the ground in the corner. She raked it smooth, and then, with the handle, made little furrows, not over an inch deep, and about three feet long. Mrs. Trumbull tore off an end of the radish envelop and sprinkled the tiny seeds lightly into one of the open furrows.

“There!” exclaimed Elizabeth, as she caught sight of the hard specks which were n’t much larger than pinheads, “I told you the pictures fibbed.”

“What do you mean, child?” inquired Mrs. Trumbull.

“Look at the radishes on the outside,

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and then look at these things," said Elizabeth.

"You didn't expect to find the envelop full of radishes all grown, did you?" demanded Mrs. Trumbull. "These are seeds."

"I know. But do you expect they'll grow as big as the pictures?"

"Of course they will. Now cover them up. Don't press them down hard, but just cover them with dirt and pat it down lightly."

Elizabeth obeyed, and had just finished one row, when she heard a voice.

"Have you turned farmer as well as cook?"

She glanced up. Her cheeks instantly turned a deep crimson. There stood Roy Thornton, looking as spick-and-span as usual. And she was down on her knees in an old dress and was wearing a pair of gloves well soiled with dirt. Furthermore, she had an uncomfortable feeling

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that, in brushing back her hair, she had smudged her face.

“Howdy, Roy,” Mrs. Trumbull greeted him.

“Good afternoon, Mrs. Trumbull,” he said, smiling back at her.

Elizabeth sprang to her feet, and looked about to see if the Brookfield girls were in sight. If she saw them, she made up her mind, she would run. But apparently Roy was alone. He stood hat in hand, his sandy hair looking almost golden in the sunlight. It was in far better order than her own.

“I was planting some radishes,” she informed him.

“I s’pose *your* garden is all planted?” said Mrs. Trumbull.

“I have n’t any,” he answered.

He was uncomfortable at being forced to make the confession. Mrs. Trumbull stared at him in a way that made him realize he had dropped a peg in her esti-

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mation. She looked at these old-fashioned duties of a man as so much a matter of course, that it seemed like an admission of weakness not to live up to them. Moreover, he seemed to care more for her good opinion than that of any woman he had met for a long time.

“You see,” he explained, “we have n’t any place for a garden at our house.”

Mrs. Trumbull instantly grew sympathetic. She had very often heard about city people who were so poor that a dozen or more families had to live cooped up in one house, and she pitied them.

“Well, I’m sorry for you,” declared Mrs. Trumbull.

“It makes me sorry for myself when I see all the fun you and Beth are having here,” answered Roy.

Elizabeth made a motion as though to return to the house.

“Are you all through?” he asked wistfully.

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“Martin is to do the rest,” answered Elizabeth; “we were only planting the garden sauce.”

“Are you all through with that?”

“I think so. See, there is a row of radishes.”

“Lor, child!” broke in Mrs. Trumbull, “you have only begun! You have n’t touched your lettuce and beets and turnips and squash.”

“Good! Would you let me help a little?” he pleaded.

“I thought we might go back to the house,” suggested Elizabeth, uncertainly.

She knew her front room was immaculate, and, after having received him in the kitchen, she wished to show him that. But he insisted that it was too fair a day to go indoors, and that he would never dare to call if he felt that he always interrupted her. Besides, he wished to learn something about making a garden.

“You know,” he explained to Mrs.

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Trumbull, "if ever I make any money, I'm going to live on a farm. I'm tired of apartments. I want elbow room."

"That's a good idea!" exclaimed Mrs. Trumbull, heartily. "I'm glad to show a boy who talks that way how to do things. Now you just take hold of that rake, and we'll have these seeds planted in a jiffy."

Roy eagerly seized the rake, and, while Elizabeth looked on, made the rest of the furrows. He worked for an hour, apparently enjoying every minute of the time. He chattered on about one thing and another, and kept both Elizabeth and Mrs. Trumbull laughing at his remarks. He covered himself with dirt from head to foot, which had the effect of making Elizabeth feel decidedly more comfortable. When, finally, he acquired a broad smudge on one cheek, she felt quite at ease about her own appearance. She protested once or twice that it was n't fair to allow him

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to plant everything, but he refused to stop until the last seed was in the ground.

When Martin came back from his end of the field, he was amazed at what had been accomplished.

"If I may say it," he remarked, "you are a very fast worker, miss."

"Oh," she laughed, "I don't deserve the credit for this. Mr. Thornton did it."

"But the ladies deserve the credit for it, just the same," answered Thornton, gallantly. "I only obeyed orders."

Martin quite agreed, but he only bowed deferentially.

"I dare say he would like a chance to wash his hands and brush his clothes," said Mrs. Trumbull. "Maybe, too, he could eat a doughnut."

"Doughnut!" exclaimed Thornton. "I guess I could!"

Elizabeth escorted him to the front of the house and into the immaculate sitting-room, but they had no sooner entered it,



Roy made the rest of the furrows

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than Mrs. Trumbull bade him follow her into the kitchen, where he could wash his hands. Before Elizabeth could protest, he was out of the room, and the next minute was plashing in the tin wash-basin in the sink. He dried his face and hands unconcernedly on the roller-towel. Elizabeth was vexed that he had found his way to the kitchen again. She had planned to serve his doughnuts on a china plate with a napkin, in the sitting-room. Instead of that, Mrs. Trumbull calmly handed him the doughnut jar, and bade him help himself. He did not appear to be at all disturbed, but Elizabeth bit her lips with vexation. The next second, however, he startled her with an invitation that drove everything else from her thoughts.

“I almost forgot what I came down here for,” he said. “I want you and Mrs. Trumbull to be my guests at the Donnington game.”

Elizabeth caught her breath. If there

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was one honor more prized than another by the girls of Miss Grimshawe's school, it was to receive an invitation to this, the chief base-ball game of the season. It was a still greater honor to be asked by a member of the team, and to be asked by the captain, conferred distinction for the rest of the year. It had come to be an unwritten law that the captain should ask but one girl outside his own family, and Elizabeth knew that Helen Brookfield confidently expected the invitation. She remembered hearing her discuss what she should wear to the game.

As this last fact flashed through her mind, it brought her up with a sharp pang. *She* had nothing to wear. Her father might make a concession on such an occasion as this, but she would never ask him. She brought her lips together. She determined instantly to thrust the whole matter from her mind.

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"It is very kind of you," she answered with an effort, "but I—I can't accept."

"Oh, look here, Beth!" protested Roy.

"I can't," she stammered. "Really I—I can't."

Roy turned to Mrs. Trumbull.

"May n't she?" he asked.

"Lor, I don't see any reason why she should n't go!" answered Mrs. Trumbull.

"There," said Roy, turning again to Elizabeth. "Of course you'll come. Mother will call in the machine and pick you up. You *must* come, Beth."

Elizabeth did not dare trust herself to open her mouth, but she resolutely shook her head.

"Why do you do that, Beth?" he asked anxiously.

"Because—oh, please don't ask me anything more."

Her eyes were beginning to fill in spite of herself. Roy picked up his hat and turned to leave.

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“Don’t decide now,” he pleaded. “I ’ll come around in a day or two and see you again.”

Elizabeth did not answer, and he hurried out, completely mystified. As soon as the door closed behind him, Elizabeth hid her face in her hands and began to sob. Mrs. Trumbull stole up and placed her arms about the girl.

“What is it, deary?” she asked.

“Oh, I—I want to go!” sobbed Elizabeth.

“Then why in the world *don’t* you go?”

“I c-can’t. I have n’t any new gown to wear!”

“Is that all?” answered Mrs. Trumbull in relief. “Well, I guess your father will tend to that.”

Elizabeth drew herself free.

“No,” she declared. “I won’t ask him!”

Mrs. Trumbull thought a moment.

“When is this game?” she inquired.

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“Next Saturday,” answered Elizabeth.

“Why, then we’ve plenty of time. We’ll *make* something for you to wear.”

“*Make* a dress? What in the world will we make it of?” asked Elizabeth.

“My last gown cost sixty dollars.”

“Sixty dollars!” exclaimed Mrs. Trumbull, with a gasp. Then, suddenly, she seemed to have an inspiration. She thought a moment and asked,

“Beth, have you been up in the attic yet?”

Elizabeth shook her head.

“Do you know, I believe some of your mother’s dresses are packed away there?”

“What of it?” asked Elizabeth indifferently.

“You’re just about your ma’s size.”

“But—”

“I’ll go up there and see. If they are what I remember, I reckon you’ll go to that game!”

Elizabeth watched Mrs. Trumbull dis-

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appear up the attic stairs without daring to believe that any such good fortune awaited her. She feared that a costume that Mrs. Trumbull herself might consider suitable would, as a matter of fact, turn out to be impossible. It did not seem probable that clothes of fifteen years ago could be altered to conform to the style of to-day.

And yet she had come to have a tremendous amount of faith in Mrs. Trumbull.

In an attempt to forget the whole incident, Elizabeth busied herself about the room until she heard Mrs. Trumbull coming down the stairs again. When the latter appeared, she was carrying over her arm a gown of dainty lawn covered with a delicate rose pattern. In delight, tempered with reverence, Elizabeth took it to the window. The sleeves were short and small. The skirt, a little full, had an overskirt trimmed with a broad band of pink.

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“Why,” exclaimed Elizabeth, “this is exactly the way Helen said she was going to have her new dress made! It is what people are wearing now.”

Mrs. Trumbull laughed.

“I ’ve often said that so long as I did n’t change the cut of my clothes, I was bound to be in style once in a quarter of a century anyhow.”

Elizabeth shook out the wrinkles and held the skirt to her waist. It just cleared the floor. If it had been made for her, the length could have been no better. The waist measure, too, seemed to be her own.

“If you were twins, you could n’t be more of a size,” commented Mrs. Trumbull.

“Oh, it ’s really lovely!” Elizabeth cried excitedly. “It ’s all hand-made! And look at this lace!”

“It ’s real old lace!” Mrs. Trumbull assured her. “Your grandmother gave it to her, I remember.”

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“And they are wearing the sleeves small and short, and—do you think it will really fit me?”

“Slip it on,” suggested Mrs. Trumbull.

Elizabeth was out of her waist in no time and into the other.

“Land sakes!” gasped Mrs. Trumbull, as Elizabeth buttoned the dress. “I’m glad your father is n’t here now.”

“Why?”

“He would n’t believe his eyes! It’s your ma, to the life, standing there.”

“Does n’t it fit nicely?”

Mrs. Trumbull examined the costume critically. With a few slight alterations, it would fit Elizabeth as though made for her. It was close enough to the prevailing fashion not to appear odd, and, besides, it had a quaint, old-fashioned air which distinguished both the gown and the wearer.

Mrs. Trumbull started again toward the attic, as though with a fresh inspiration.

AN INVITATION

“Stand where you are!” she called back.

She returned at once with a poke-bonnet trimmed with pink, which looked for all the world like one of the very latest automobile bonnets. Elizabeth put on this, and tied the ribbons beneath her chin.

She certainly made a pretty picture, and Mrs. Trumbull was enthusiastic.

“My dear,” she exclaimed, “I never did think I ’d ride in an automobile at my age, or look on at a base-ball game, but I declare I will, just to sit beside you!”

X

THE DONNINGTON GAME

ELIZABETH at once wrote her acceptance, and the next day Roy called to express his delight and to hand her a very cordial note from his mother.

Elizabeth passed the rest of the week in happy confusion. With the assistance of a local dressmaker, the gown was let out here and taken in there, until it fitted perfectly. When this was finally completed, it seemed to Elizabeth that Saturday would never come in spite of the many things about the house she had to occupy her. She could n't explain her present excitement, because this was not the first time she had been to the Donnington game. Nor could she account for her ea-

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gerness altogether in the fact that she was going as the guest of the captain. Neither did her gown account for it. She felt rather as though she were some new Elizabeth going out for the first time. Before now she had always been Elizabeth of The Towers, who was only Mr. Spencer Churchill's daughter. But she who was going this afternoon was Elizabeth Churchill. She was going from her own home, in her own gown, and on her own merits. This gave her a sense of responsibility and of importance, too.

On Saturday morning, she flew around and finished her cooking, and called Martin to tell him that he must watch the baked beans while she was gone. The latter fidgeted uneasily at this announcement.

“I don’t know much about that work, as you might say,” he warned her.

“Why, there is n’t anything you have to know,” answered Elizabeth, lightly.

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“You must just keep the fire going, and see that the water does n’t dry out. You must fill up the pot about every half hour.”

Martin took out his watch.

“Every thirty minutes, miss?” He nodded as seriously as though he felt if he ran over a second, the world would come to an end.

“*About* every thirty minutes,” answered Elizabeth. “But you won’t have to sit there watch in hand.”

“Very well, miss,” answered Martin, with a deep sigh.

By one o’clock, Elizabeth was all dressed, and was fussing over Mrs. Trumbull, trying to make her look as nice as possible. The latter had refused flatly to have her hair curled, or to wear a bit of ribbon around her throat, so that, after all, there was n’t very much Elizabeth could do. However, Mrs. Trumbull was very neat and trim, even if she did n’t look stylish.

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At two o'clock promptly, the big touring-car drove into the yard, and Elizabeth, with her heart in her mouth, stepped out to meet Mrs. Thornton. She felt that the latter's kindly eyes would decide instantly the success or failure of her new costume. She did not have to wait long for a verdict. Mrs. Thornton leaned forward, with her hand outstretched.

"Why, you picture!" she exclaimed smilingly.

The warm blood rushed to Elizabeth's cheeks.

"This is my mother's gown," she explained simply.

"It is so beautiful! And the bonnet—you'll forgive me for commenting so? But Elizabeth—you look like a combination of Paris and Plymouth Rock. It's the quaintest and prettiest dress I've seen this year! Do stand off a little, and let me look at you."

"Are n't you proud of her, Mrs. Trum-

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bull?" she demanded, as Elizabeth obeyed.

"She looks exactly like her mother," answered Mrs. Trumbull.

As they reached the grounds and made their way to their seats in the grand stand, Mrs. Thornton overheard many a suppressed exclamation of pleasure as her young companion passed. And as Elizabeth took her place and looked about her, she found herself responding to nods and greetings here and there as she recognized one or another of her schoolmates. Roy came running across the field from where he was directing his men in preliminary practice. Every one watched him as he advanced to the grand stand to greet his guests, but no one more sharply than the Brookfield girls, who sat near.

"As this is your first game, Mrs. Trumbull," Roy said, as he shook hands with the latter, "we 'll have to play our best for you."

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Then he turned to Elizabeth with frank enthusiasm.

“Why, Beth!” he exclaimed. “You look so stunning, that we ’ll have to *win* for you!”

She felt curiously at her ease as he stood before her.

“Of course you ’ll win,” she smiled.

“Don’t forget that Harden is in the box for the Donningtons,” he answered seriously; “and that Wenham is a wonder at the bat.”

With a few more words he left, and went back to the field. The game was soon called, and then all other matters, except the contest itself, were forgotten—at least by Elizabeth. She lost herself at once, as she always did, in the nip-and-tuck battle which was being waged on the green diamond in front of her.

For three innings neither side scored, and then Wenham knocked a grounder between second and third. He was famous

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for those. He never struck hard at a ball, but he had the knack of "placing" it quite often. He made first, and at the next pitch stole second. Then Harden made a two-base hit, which brought Wenham home. So the score stood until the eighth inning.

Harden was pitching a magnificent game, and though Thornton's pitcher was not doing so well, his team, by fast fielding, was able to offset this weakness.

In the first half of the eighth, Thornton saw one of his men land on second after a two-base hit. A sacrifice hit sent the man to third, and then he himself came to the bat. He realized that here was his opportunity. Half unconsciously as he stepped to the plate, he glanced toward his mother. He was always sure of finding her eyes upon him. This time he caught an encouraging wave of her hand. He saw not only this, but the slight figure of the girl next to her leaning forward ex-



A nip-and-tuck battle was being waged on the diamond

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pectantly. There was something about the tilt of the little poke-bonnet that made him wish very much to bring in that run.

He faced Harden with every line in his face expressing determination. But every line in Harden's face also expressed determination. Chums though they were at home, on the ball-field they were grim antagonists. Thornton caught the yell of his schoolmates, who rose to their feet to spur him on to make the most of this chance, but the yell was interrupted by an equally noisy cry from the Donnington supporters. So far as Thornton was concerned, he was playing now to the earnest quiet eyes of his mother, and to a little poke-bonnet.

Harden pitched his first ball high and wide. Thornton allowed it to pass, but it clipped the corner of the plate, and the umpire called one strike. Because of this, Thornton swung at the second, though it

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came in a still wider curve. He missed it. He kept his head, however, and did not offer at the next two. The fifth ball was a swift inshoot, but Thornton saw it break in time to swing. It shot from his bat like a bullet, in a low-line drive between first and second. With the roar of five hundred people in his ears, he made first and swung around in time to see his man sliding safely for home.

The score was now tied. But Thornton knew that the men following him were weak at the bat. He stole a dangerously long distance off first. Harden swung suddenly and sent the ball to the first baseman. At the motion, Thornton sprang for second. As he neared it, he saw that the ball had beaten him. He was trapped. He turned, and Harden's whole team seemed to close in upon him. Still he did not give up hope, but darted back and forth in the hope that an error might give him his opportunity. And that is just

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what happened. The short-stop, becoming excited, made a wild throw to Harden, and though the latter jumped high for it, he could not hold the ball. It rolled from his glove to the ground, and gave Thornton time to get safely to second. The next man at the bat drove a deep fly to center, which the fielder failed to capture. Thornton, who had paused close to third, made a dash for home as he saw the muff, and by a clever slide, beat out the ball at the plate by a fraction of a second.

As he rose, covered with dust, he heard a chorus of ringing cheers ending with his name. He raised his eyes to the grand stand, and saw Elizabeth standing up, with Mrs. Trumbull beside her, both waving handkerchiefs wildly. He smiled, and took his place on the players' bench.

This was practically the end of the game, and the score ended two to one. As the crowd in the grand stand began to break up, a number of Elizabeth's school

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friends came to greet her, among them the Brookfield girls.

“You gave yourself an afternoon off?” asked Helen, sweetly, at the first pause that occurred.

“Yes,” answered Elizabeth. “Though I don’t know what has happened to my dinner in the meantime.”

“It must be very hard to be maid and mistress too, must n’t it, Helen?” asked Jane.

“It’s simpler in some ways than having maids,” replied Elizabeth, good-naturedly. “If things go wrong, you have only yourself to blame.”

Mrs. Thornton, who had been nodding to some of her friends, caught this sentence.

“I quite agree with you, Elizabeth,” she put in.

Both Helen and Jane lingered a few moments longer, but soon found themselves, in some way, on the outside of the gen-

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eral talk, and, with a half-hearted smile, rejoined their friends. They were all moving toward the exit, and here they were met by Roy, who brought with him Nance Barton and her mother, whom he had chanced upon as they were leaving.

There was a moment of embarrassment after greetings were exchanged, and Nance and Elizabeth were left together. Each girl was a little uncertain as to just what attitude the other intended to assume, for they had not met since the tennis game. For a second, Elizabeth was swept back to that day, and forgot many things she had learned since then. She tossed up her head aggressively in the old way that was almost a challenge. The effect of this was to rouse in Nance an equally defiant mood, and so they stood, inwardly friends, but outwardly constrained.

Roy turned, and seemed at a glance to understand the situation. He spoke to Nance.

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“You ought to taste some of Beth’s doughnuts,” he laughed. “You don’t know what a fine cook she is getting to be.”

“Beth—a cook?” exclaimed Nance.

The exclamation came with such frank surprise that Elizabeth herself laughed.

“And so is Roy,” she nodded.

“Oh, I’m only the first assistant,” replied Roy.

He turned back to Mrs. Trumbull, and left the two together again. Nance impulsively placed her hand on Elizabeth’s arm.

“Beth,” she said, “may I call and see you—soon? I ought to be ashamed to ask it, but I’d be more ashamed if I waited any longer.”

“You need n’t feel ashamed for calling or—for not calling,” Elizabeth answered quietly.

“Then I may come?”

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“I wish you would, Nance! I should love to see you!”

With a smile and a wave of her hand, Nance, with her mother, turned away as the group broke up, and a few minutes later, Beth and her own party were also on their way home.

XI

A GOOD-BY CALL

ONE morning a week later, Martin came in with the excited announcement, "They 're up!"

"Who 's up?" inquired Elizabeth.

"The radishes, and lettuce, and peas, and corn."

"They are!" exclaimed Elizabeth. "Then I need n't worry any more about my dinner. I will have a salad and some green peas."

"Lors!" said Martin, "they ain't up that much. They 're just peeking out o' the ground."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Elizabeth. "Then they won't be ready to eat for a long time."

A GOOD-BY CALL

"Not for days and days," said Martin.

"Can't you hurry them along?" she asked.

Martin suppressed a smile.

"They have to take their time about growing, just as you and I do," he answered.

"When do you think they will be ready?"

"Lors! you 'll have radishes in a month."

"Very well," she replied magnanimously, "if that 's the best you can do."

"Would you like to see them?" he asked, with some pride.

"I will come out as soon as I 've finished my morning's work," she answered as she turned away.

It was already beginning to be easy for her to prepare the early breakfast. There was a certain amount of excitement about this mixing of various dishes, sliding them into the oven, and seeing what resulted from the baking. It still seemed

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to her more like some mysterious trick than a science.

A great many things had seemed easier since the ball game. She found herself going gaily about her tasks. Roy's kindness, the friendliness of Nance, and the sight of her schoolmates, all helped to put her in a better frame of mind. She began to realize that if her friends had not called upon her, it was perhaps her own fault. She had certainly not been very cordial to those who had come.

Roy had already called twice at the little cottage since the game. He took such an interest in whatever she happened to be doing, that he always left her with the feeling that she was upon some great adventure. Mrs. Trumbull had told of how her grandmother had gone over the plains with the early pioneers, and of the hardships and privations she had endured. Of course what she was doing could not be compared with that, and yet Roy made her

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feel that, in a small way, she was doing something similar.

“What are you thinking of?” inquired Mrs. Trumbull, this morning, as she noticed the girl’s abstraction.

Elizabeth laughed.

“Martin wanted me to look at the garden,” she answered, seizing the first excuse she could think of to escape further questioning. “Do you want to come?”

“No. Run along and I ’ll go up-stairs and put my room to rights.”

Elizabeth hurried out, still wearing her gingham apron. She found the brown earth alive with tiny sprouts, but she could not tell which were weeds and which were vegetables. She pulled up a few, but was still no wiser. As she looked around for Martin, she heard the sound of horse’s hoofs upon the grass, and saw Helen Brookfield galloping toward her.

Had it been possible, she would have retreated, but there was nothing to do under

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the circumstances but to look up and smile as the latter drew rein. It was evident from the expression in Helen's bright eyes, that she was charged with excitement of some sort.

"I've just come over to say good-by, Beth," she began eagerly. "I'm going away next week."

"Really?" Elizabeth replied with interest.

"It's so grand and sudden, that I can't realize it yet. We—we are going to Europe for the summer."

"To Europe?" echoed Elizabeth.

"Yes. Father has to go on business, and decided at the last moment to take us with him."

She uptilted her head a trifle.

"Why, that's really fine, Helen," answered Elizabeth.

"I will send you picture postals so that you'll know where we are," said Helen, with great condescension. "I'm afraid

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it will be lonely for you here this summer. Is this your flower garden?"

"No," answered Elizabeth, "it's my vegetable garden."

"Really?" returned Helen, with a lift of her eyebrows. "And you planted it yourself?"

"With some help," nodded Elizabeth. "Martin helped, and Mrs. Trumbull helped, and Roy helped—a kind of co-operative garden, you see."

"Roy? I think that very nice of him," she answered. "He is so tender-hearted!"

"What has that to do with it?" demanded Elizabeth.

"Oh, nothing, only—well, I suppose he can't help pitying you."

"Pity? Me?" cried Elizabeth.

"Of course we all do," Helen hastened to add. "But perhaps in the fall you can come back to school, though I suppose you'll have to go into a lower class."

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Elizabeth murmured something, she hardly knew what. For a moment, she felt ashamed and humiliated under the sting of being pitied. The heart went out of her, and she felt more like crying than doing anything else. She heard Helen say good-by and heard her gallop off, and then she turned back slowly toward the house.

The cruel part of this new point of view was that it came at just the moment when Elizabeth had ceased pitying herself. Even now she felt no trace of self-pity. And now to be pitied by others—even by Roy—destroyed at a single blow all the romance of her adventure.

She knew, to be sure, that Helen's remarks were always to be taken with a grain of salt, but, in this case, she felt there was a certain basis for them. Reviewing the incidents since Roy's first visit, they seemed to fit into Helen's theory. He had found her in the kitchen, and in his



"Oh nothing, only—well, I suppose he can't help pitying you."

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wish to make the situation easier for her, had tried to help her cook the doughnuts; he had returned, and, for the same reason, had helped her in the garden; he had noticed that she was not attending dancing school and had few visitors, and so had invited her to the game. It was for no merits or accomplishments of her own. She could not sing—except with the tea-kettle; she knew little French; she could not even play tennis. Before she was through with herself, she was convinced she could do nothing.

Once again she found herself dangerously near crying. She drew herself up sharply. Crying would do no good; it was worse than moping. Mrs. Trumbull's advice flashed into her head like a warning, and she caught some of that good lady's aggressiveness. She was sure the latter would n't waste any time in useless regret. Neither would her mother. Both women would go ahead in some way and

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remedy matters. Her lips came firmly together.

If she had learned to cook, why should n't she learn to sing? if she had learned to keep house, why should n't she learn French? if she had learned to plant a garden, why could n't she even learn to play tennis? That she did not have these accomplishments at present was her own fault for having neglected her opportunities, but she had the whole summer before her, and, if she worked hard, it might be possible to do much before fall. She felt that moment as though it was possible to accomplish anything before then. Another idea lent romance to the undertaking: she would do these things by herself, and then, when Roy and the others came back from their summer vacation, she would surprise them all. She would sing for Miss Santier as the latter always said she might sing if only she practised her exercises; she would address Helen Brook-

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field in French; she might possibly challenge Roy at tennis; and, finally, astonish her father with all three acquirements.

In the glow of her new enthusiasm, she ran swiftly into the house and up the back stairs to her own room. She put her hair in order before Mrs. Trumbull learned of her presence. When the latter finally heard her moving about, she opened the door.

“How ’d you find the garden?” she inquired.

Elizabeth kept her head turned away as much as possible. She did not yet wish to confide, even to Mrs. Trumbull, her great project.

“They are up,” she answered, repeating Martin’s announcement.

“You were gone so long, I did n’t know but what you got lost,” said Mrs. Trumbull.

“Helen—Helen Brookfield rode by,” Elizabeth explained.

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“Oh, she did, did she?” exclaimed Mrs. Trumbull. “What did she want?”

“She wanted to tell me she is going abroad.”

“Well, I’m glad of it. I hope she’ll stay abroad.”

“I hope she will stay until fall,” answered Elizabeth.

Lightly humming a song Elizabeth hurried down to the kitchen. She had no sooner arrived than she heard a knock on the door. She recognized it with a start. It was Roy. For a moment, she hesitated, and then retreated across the room on tiptoe, and hurried up the stairs to Mrs. Trumbull.

“There—there’s some one at the door,” she said, a little out of breath with excitement.

Mrs. Trumbull looked up sharply.

“Well,” she demanded, “why did n’t you open it?”

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“Because I don’t want to see him,” answered Elizabeth.

“See who?”

“Roy.”

“Land sakes!” returned Mrs. Trumbull, in astonishment. “You don’t mean to say that you two have quarreled! You have n’t been so foolish!”

“No. It is n’t that. But—won’t you please tell him that I can’t see him?”

“I don’t—I really don’t like to do it,” Mrs. Trumbull said frankly. “But if you can give me any good reason—”

The knock was repeated, for Roy could tell by the smoke from the chimney that some one was at home.

“Is it because of anything that Helen Brookfield said?” demanded Mrs. Trumbull.

“It—it’s something she told me,” Elizabeth admitted finally; “but—oh, please go down!”

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For a moment, Mrs. Trumbull studied the girl sharply. She saw that Elizabeth was really in earnest, and that whatever was troubling her was no mere passing whim. She started reluctantly toward the door.

“All right,” she said, “I ’ll do it, but I don’t like the idea at all.”

She went down-stairs, and a moment later, Elizabeth heard her talking with Roy. Then in a moment she heard the door close. She tiptoed to the window and saw Roy striding down the path carrying his shoulders well back as usual. Unseen by him, she waved him good-by. “Oh,” she exclaimed to herself, “I ’ll show them! I ’ll show them all!”

XII

A NEW FRIENDSHIP

WHILE Mrs. Trumbull was dressing next morning, she heard, in the kitchen below, such a gladsome trill of fresh, young notes, blending with the morning songs of the birds, that she paused to listen. The voice was so strong and full of joy that it filled her own old heart, and sent her back in her thoughts a full twenty-five years. It was so Elizabeth's mother used to begin the day.

Hurrying through her toilet, Mrs. Trumbull stole down the stairs and stood a moment at the kitchen door. Everything in the room seemed to be singing: the fire in the stove, the kettle on top of it, and the golden sun, which, in a broad,

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warm stream, poured through the windows. Elizabeth, with crimson cheeks and in a gingham apron, stood beside the bread board cutting out biscuits, which were almost ready to go into the oven. She was still singing, and though her song consisted of nothing but exercises which Miss Santier had given her to practise last winter, there was music in every note. Mrs. Trumbull did n't know one tune from another, anyway, but she knew a singing heart when she heard one. And if ever the spirit of a summer morning could be expressed in music, it was being now so expressed.

Mrs. Trumbull stepped into the room, and, crossing to Elizabeth's side, kissed her on the forehead. With a laugh and a little courtesy, Elizabeth greeted her in French.

“Bon jour, Madame Trumbull.”

Madame Trumbull stared at the girl, as though fearing she had lost her wits.

A NEW FRIENDSHIP

“What’s that?” she demanded.

“It’s French for good morning,” explained Elizabeth.

“What do you want to put it into French for? Seems to me that plain English is good enough for every-day Americans.”

“*Vraiment?*” answered Elizabeth, with a twinkle.

“*Vraymong?* What is *Vraymong?*”

“It’s a polite way of saying, ‘Really,’ ” answered Elizabeth.

“Bah! I don’t call it polite answering a person back in a way she can’t understand.”

“But you must learn with me,” Elizabeth explained enthusiastically. “If ever we should go to France—”

“Catch me going to France!” answered Mrs. Trumbull. “That chef up to The Towers is all I want to see of Frenchmen.”

“There’s an idea!” cried Elizabeth.

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“I can practise on him. Thanks! I can practise on him!”

“Nonsense! Whatever has got into you this morning, anyway?”

Elizabeth placed her biscuits in a pan and put them in the oven.

“Lots and lots of things,” she answered. “I’m going to learn to sing, and speak French, and play tennis, besides learning to keep house.”

“What for?” demanded Mrs. Trumbull, with her usual directness.

“It’s a secret,” answered Elizabeth.

“I’ll wager it has something to do with Helen Brookfield.”

“Perhaps,” answered Elizabeth. “She really did make me want to do all those things, though I don’t believe she meant to.”

“Well, you’ll do whatever you set out to do,” nodded Mrs. Trumbull. “But what in the world you want to waste time

A NEW FRIENDSHIP

on that French nonsense for is more than I know."

That afternoon, Elizabeth paid a visit to The Towers. She found that the tennis-court there, though never used, was in very good condition, for Mr. Churchill never allowed anything about the estate to suffer from neglect. He strongly approved of tennis for girls, and had had this court made in the hope that it might attract Elizabeth to the game; but she, after playing in a desultory fashion for a season, had found that it required so much exertion that she had finally dropped it altogether.

The sight of the well-rolled court filled her with renewed eagerness, but one could n't play tennis by one's self. Here was an obstacle which, in the first flush of her enthusiasm, she had not considered. With her classmates gone for the summer, she would be left quite by herself.

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She went on to find the chef, in order to carry into effect at once her second plan. The latter was very glad indeed to see her, for he found much idle time on his hands since the mistress of The Towers had left. His choicest creations often went untasted, and, for breakfast, he was allowed to display his art in nothing more complicated than soft boiled eggs and hot rolls.

“Ah, ma’m’selle!” he said to her, in French, with a deprecatory wave of his hands, “what is it possible to do with soft boiled eggs?”

“Eat them,” answered Elizabeth. “We often have them for breakfast. They are very easy to do.”

“Easy? easy?” he answered, in contempt. “It is not ease that a chef seeks, but art.”

Elizabeth laughed.

“I must tell that to Mrs. Trumbull,” she answered.

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“*Non! non! ma’m’selle,*” he begged, “for then Madame *Trombooll* might wish to come up here.”

And the man who held every one in his kitchen in abject fear, looked so very much concerned over this possible contingency, that Elizabeth hastened to change the subject.

“I’m going to practise my French on you,” she announced.

Again the chef was startled, but he recovered himself and bowed gallantly.

“It is a too great honor, ma’m’selle,” he protested.

“You mean you don’t want me to,” answered Elizabeth, somewhat chagrined.

“*Non! non!* It is not that. But listen—I have a niece—Ma’m’selle Gagnon. She has just arrived, and is very anxious to give the lessons in French. Perhaps—”

“That will be even better,” answered Elizabeth, without hesitation. “You may

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send her to the house. But I shall practise on you just the same whenever I come here."

Again the chef bowed.

"V'enever ma'm'selle wishes," he agreed.

So that much was settled at any rate, and Elizabeth returned to her own house somewhat encouraged. She was just about to enter, when she heard a voice behind her. Turning, she saw Nance Barton, dressed in tennis costume and carrying a racket. Her cheeks were glowing as a result of her recent exercise, and she walked with the easy grace of one whose muscles have free play. It was almost as though she had come in obedience to the wave of a fairy wand.

As Beth went to meet her, her eyes expressed an even more cordial welcome than her words.

"Oh, Nance!" she exclaimed heartily, "I am so glad to see you!"

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For a moment, the latter appeared a little taken aback, as though she had not expected such a warm greeting.

“I came over to see if you would be at home this evening,” she said with a trace of embarrassment.

“Why, I’m at home now,” answered Elizabeth. “I’m at home all the time, Nance.”

Elizabeth looked wistfully at the tennis racket, but Nance misinterpreted the glance. Remembering Elizabeth’s aversion to the game, she felt called upon to make an explanation, and said: “I’ve been playing with Miss Jerome.”

“We have a very good court at The Towers,” answered Elizabeth.

“I know you have,” nodded Nance; “I saw it as I came by. I wish you knew how to play, Beth.”

“So do I,” answered Elizabeth.

“You—you do? You really do?”

“Oh, Nance, you don’t know how

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much!" Elizabeth exclaimed, taking her hand impulsively.

"But—" said Nance, hesitating, "but I thought—"

"That I'd rather sit on the side-lines and look on? That's what I told you, was n't it?" and for a second Elizabeth lowered her eyes.

"Somehow I never could believe you meant it—that you were in earnest," answered Nance.

"And I was n't," Elizabeth confessed, lifting her head. "Perhaps I thought I was then, but I know now I was n't. I'm ashamed of myself, and I want to make up for it if I can. I want to do things; I want to do everything."

"I understand, Beth!"

"I don't suppose you'd want to play with me?"

"I'd love to, Beth."

"But, you know, I can't play at all—yet."

A NEW FRIENDSHIP

“But it’s in you,” Nance declared. “Do you remember when I played Miss Winthrop?”

Elizabeth nodded. She remembered the whole episode, and was not proud of her part in it.

“I saw you watching me during the last set,” went on Nance. “And I knew then that if you were in my place, you’d have won that match.”

“I know that I wanted you to win,” answered Elizabeth, with a laugh. “Oh, Nance! if you were only going to be here all summer.”

“I am!” answered Nance.

“You are n’t going away?”

“No. It was decided to-day. Father can’t leave, and so we’re going to try camping out in the city this summer. Mother says we must.”

“Then do you mean to say—”

“I ’ll play with you every day if you wish—yes, every day all summer long.”

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With an eager, glad cry, Elizabeth seized her friend's hand.

"Would you like to go up to the court now?" Nance asked.

"It—it seems too good to be true," Elizabeth laughed nervously. "It won't take me a minute to get into my tennis shoes. Come in with me, Nance?"

Elizabeth led the way into the little house, and Nance followed, a little curiously perhaps.

"Mrs. Trumbull," Elizabeth called, "I'm going to play tennis!"

Mrs. Trumbull came out with some sewing in her hands, and her spectacles shoved upon her forehead.

"Well," she observed, "I don't see 's that 's anything to get so excited about, Beth."

"Nance is to teach me, and she 's going to be here all summer."

"Well! well! well!" replied Mrs. Trumbull.

A NEW FRIENDSHIP

“I don’t believe any one would go away if they had such a nest as yours, Beth,” declared Nance, who had been looking around with surprise and interest at the cheerful, sun-lighted little room.

“You like it?” Elizabeth asked eagerly.

“It’s like a great big playhouse,” answered Nance. “I should think you’d love caring for it.”

There was a note of wistfulness in Nance’s voice that surprised Elizabeth. She had thought the latter despised house-keeping and all indoor tasks.

“I did n’t at first,” Elizabeth admitted; “but now—I guess I like doing everything.”

A few minutes later, the girls were at the court, and Elizabeth had taken her position as jauntily as Nance herself. She won the serve, and as a result of her keen observation and knack of imitation, so aped the form of a good player, that when she tossed up the ball and swooped down

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upon it with her racket, as she had seen Nance do a hundred times, the latter came up on her toes as though preparing for the attack of an expert. The ball, however, instead of speeding over the net and dropping to the inner court, flew off at an angle, as high and flighty as the dart of a barn-swallow.

“Oh, dear!” cried Elizabeth, “that is n’t where I aimed it.”

“You’re playing too hard,” Nance cautioned her. “You must begin easy.”

“But I don’t want to play a lady’s game; I want to play a man’s game,” said Elizabeth.

“It’s sureness that counts, whichever game you play,” Nance returned. “I wouldn’t try at first to do anything but get the ball in the court.”

Somewhat reluctantly Elizabeth obeyed the advice, and dropped the ball lightly into the court. Acting upon impulse, Nance bore down upon it and made so

A NEW FRIENDSHIP

swift a return that Elizabeth merely stood in her tracks and watched the ball speed past her.

“There!” she gasped. “You see what happens when I serve you easy ones.”

“I ought n’t to have hit it so hard,” Nance laughed in apology. “But honestly, Beth, you *look* like such a good player, that, for a moment, I really forgot you are only just beginning.”

After this, Nance returned the balls within Elizabeth’s reach, and, considering everything, the latter did very well. Try as hard as she might, however, Elizabeth could not forget the humiliating fact that Nance did not find it in the least necessary to exert herself. But this did not vex her. It had rather the wholesome effect of strengthening her resolution.

At the end of an hour, the two returned to the little house by the lane, where they found that Mrs. Trumbull had made for them a pitcher of cool lemonade. She

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served with this some of Elizabeth's cake.

"Beth can do better than this," she explained, "but I don't think it's anything to be ashamed of as it is."

"I'm afraid I didn't get quite sugar enough in it," said Elizabeth, with the tendency of a good cook to undervalue her own production.

Nance tasted of it and gave her verdict instantly:

"It's delicious."

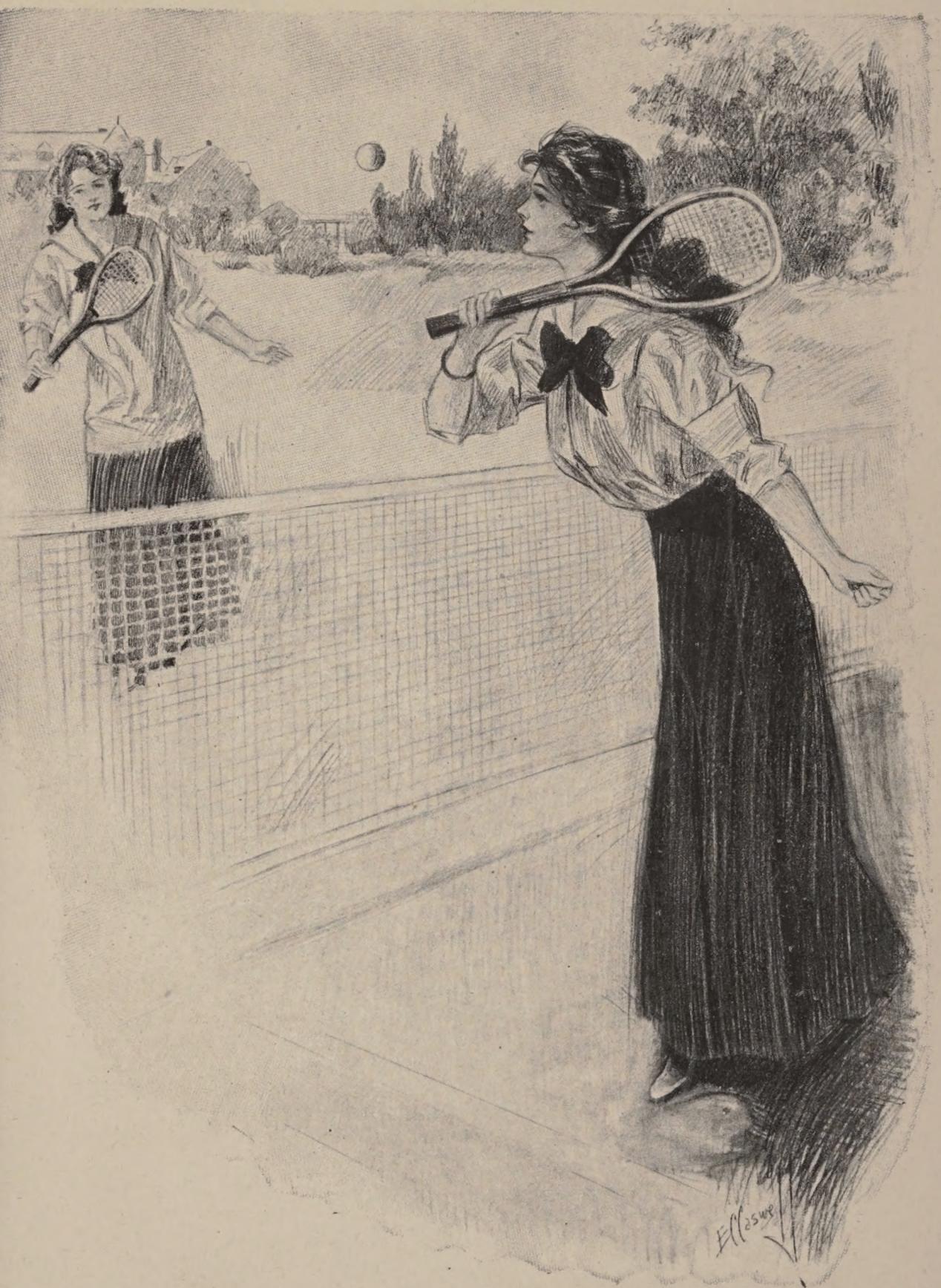
Then she added, with some hesitation:

"Beth, could you—do you suppose—oh, Beth, would you mind trying to teach me how to cook?"

"You?" exclaimed Elizabeth.

"I—I'd like to learn."

"I'll teach you all I know," cried Elizabeth. "And then Mrs. Trumbull will teach us both. But, Nance—I wonder how it happened that we never knew each other before?"



Nance returned the balls within Elizabeth's reach

A NEW FRIENDSHIP

It was after Nance had left and Beth and Mrs. Trumbull were back in the front room that Elizabeth turned impulsively to the latter.

"Aunty Trumbull," she exclaimed, "I 'm beginning to love the little house by the lane!"

Mrs. Trumbull beamed down upon the girl.

"It shows all over you," she answered. "And it shows all over the house, too."

XIII

A GUEST FOR SUPPER

ELIZABETH proved herself gifted by nature with three essentials of a good tennis-player—quickness of thought, quickness of eye, and quickness of movement. It remained for her to make her racket obedient to these faculties. This was a matter largely of practice, but, if she had not had such a good coach as Nance, she might, in the meanwhile, have acquired faults that would have taken her long to correct. Like most girls, Nance had learned the game in a haphazard fashion, and had only seen her mistakes after she had progressed to a point where they made all the difference between an exceedingly good player and a merely fair player.

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By that time, they had become so fixed as to be extremely difficult to overcome. From the first, Nance insisted that Elizabeth play very carefully, even though the result made a game more like battledore and shuttlecock than tennis.

“It’s very poky,” protested Elizabeth, who longed to hit the ball as hard as she could.

“I know it,” Nance agreed. “But it’s the only way to learn. In a game I generally feel the way you do, and pay for it by getting beaten. Miss Winthrop knew this, and just waited for me to beat myself.”

“Does n’t she play good tennis?” asked Elizabeth, in some surprise that Nance should put this forward as an excuse for her defeat.

“Indeed she does!” Nance replied quickly. “It’s good tennis to take advantage of your opponent’s weakness.”

“I thought you played a better game

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than she did in the tournament," said Elizabeth.

"At times I did," laughed Nance. "But that is n't what counts. It's better to play a good game all the time than a brilliant game part of the time."

"I don't believe it's as much fun though," Elizabeth declared.

"In the end it is," answered Nance. "It's steadiness that wins, and winning is *part* of the fun, anyhow."

Day after day they used the court at "The Towers," and, for three weeks, Nance insisted upon making the play as slow as it was possible to make it and keep the ball moving. She allowed Elizabeth to attempt nothing but straight shots.

"For," she explained, "the first thing to make sure of is that your return lands in the court. The fastest and prettiest stroke in the world won't count you a point, if it goes out of bounds."

But, even using no speed, Nance was

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able to keep Elizabeth running about the court in a way that gave her plenty of exercise. And though, at first, this practice seemed dull to Nance herself, she discovered before long that it was proving just as valuable to her as to her pupil.

In this way Elizabeth became thoroughly limbered up, and learned to keep her eye on the ball, and to move her racket almost unconsciously. The little she had played the year before helped her in this.

The next step added both interest and excitement to the game; without increasing the speed of the ball Nance instructed Elizabeth to do as she herself had been doing all along, attempt place shots.

"You ought to know just where every ball is going when you strike it, and just why you want it to go there," explained Nance. "But you must n't forget your first lesson while you are trying this. Remember, the thing that always counts is

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to have the ball land somewhere in the court."

To emphasize the value of placing, Nance at first stood still at the end of each play until the ball on the return struck the ground. This gave Elizabeth an opportunity to see just how far out of reach of her opponent she succeeded in driving it. It taught her, furthermore, to look for open spaces and to keep Nance on the move.

This continued for another three weeks, and then Nance allowed more speed.

"Hit the ball a little harder, Beth," said Nance; "but don't try any cuts for the present. A hard, straight ball, well placed and sure, is better than a hundred fancy strokes that go wild. Miss Winthrop taught me that, though I ought to have known it before."

By the first of August, the two girls were playing a game that was really in-

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teresting to watch. It was straight, heady tennis, with some speed and few faults. Every point was contested as much with the brain as the arm, and, though Nance, of course, was still beating Elizabeth, she found it necessary to work harder every day.

But the thing that made it interesting, after all, was Elizabeth's intense earnestness. Some new quality had been roused in her which gave her not only eagerness but patience. From the beginning of every game to the end, she played each point as hard and as conscientiously as possible. She never flagged. The last game of the last set called forth as much in her as the first game. More, perhaps, for it nettled her to think she was not yet able to press Nance to her best.

"You keep on playing better all the time," laughed Elizabeth, at the end of one hard-fought set.

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“You make me,” Nance replied quietly. “But even if I beat you, I’d rather play with you than any one I know.”

“Now, Nance!”

“Honestly. I have to use my head more.”

The compliment pleased Elizabeth, and she knew it was sincere. Nance was as outspoken as a boy, especially in the matter of tennis.

“And I love to play with you, but I can’t help wanting to beat you, Nance,” Elizabeth answered with equal frankness.

“I think you will, in the end,” Nance answered. “But if you do, you’ll make me play my hardest.”

“And it’s playing hard that makes it fun,” added Elizabeth, with her lips firmly together.

But, if Elizabeth was catching up with Nance on the tennis-court, Nance had the satisfaction of seeing herself catch up with Elizabeth in the kitchen. It added to the

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interest of both girls to work together, and, under the able tutoring of Mrs. Trumbull, they advanced rapidly. Mrs. Trumbull had much the same idea about learning to cook that Nance had about learning to play tennis.

“Learn the plain, simple things first,” she said. “After that there’s time enough to fool round with folderols. Beth’s mother made the best bread I ever ate. A man won’t starve to death if he has good bread.”

At first, Nance found it impossible to work up very much enthusiasm over this new acquirement. Only a sense of duty, and Elizabeth’s eagerness, saved the task from drudgery. That was all it had ever been considered at home, where the constant worry over securing and satisfying a good cook made housekeeping a real burden. But, at the end of a few weeks, Nance imbibed a new spirit here in the house by the lane. The kitchen was not

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so much a feature of housekeeping as it was of home-making. This was equally true of the other necessary duties. The result was the creation of so intimate and personal an atmosphere under this roof that the presence of a servant would have seemed almost like an intrusion. From cellar to garret, this was Elizabeth's house—as much a part of her as she was a part of it.

Though Nance, of course, did not have an equally personal interest in the house, she found herself in a very short time sharing, to a large extent, Elizabeth's enthusiasm. Mrs. Trumbull made her feel that, as a woman, she would be called upon, some day, to direct a household, and that it would then be to her honor that she was prepared.

“A man isn’t a man who can’t handle tools and animals!” Mrs. Trumbull exclaimed one day, as the conversation drifted back to what boys used to know

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in the old days. "No, sir, not if he's president of a bank! And a woman is n't a woman who can't take care of a house—not if she's the wife of a bank president. A woman can be whatever she likes *after* she knows how to sew and cook and make a home; but she's got to know that first to be a woman."

"But a great many of them *don't* know how to do these things," laughed Nance.

"I've learned that since I came up here," Mrs. Trumbull answered. "And I've no patience with that kind! They are as helpless as kittens when the cook leaves, and of about as much use."

"All girls don't have the chance to learn that Beth has had," answered Nance.

"If I'd had my own way, I would n't have had the chance," laughed Elizabeth. "You don't know how I hated to come down here."

"You were different then, Beth," answered Nance.

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“So were you,” replied Elizabeth.

That evening after Nance had gone, Mrs. Trumbull observed:

“I wish every one of your friends could live here a while with you.”

“Even the Brookfield girls?” asked Elizabeth.

“Well, it would do them good,” declared Mrs. Trumbull; “but I must say I’d hate to be around.”

“There’s Daddy,” began Elizabeth, with a little break in her voice, and a wistful look toward “The Towers.”

“It would do him more good than any one,” Mrs. Trumbull affirmed.

“But he won’t come.”

Mrs. Trumbull placed her hand affectionately on the girl’s shoulder.

“There, child, there!” she said. “Don’t worry about him. It takes time to change a man as set in his ways as he is.”

But it happened that this very evening, as they were sitting down to supper, there

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was a rap at the front door. Elizabeth answered it, and found her father there. She threw her arms about his neck.

“Oh, Daddy, but I’m glad to see you!” she cried. “You don’t know how very glad I am!”

He softly smoothed back her hair without speaking.

“We were just sitting down to supper. You’ll stay, Daddy?”

“I’m afraid not,” he answered, “I just stopped to see you for a moment. I have a great deal to do to-night.”

But, seizing his hand, Elizabeth drew him into the dining-room. The table looked very dainty, and the simple repast very tempting. Before he had time to protest further, she had run about and brought a chair to the table, and set a place for him. The next thing he knew, he found himself seated.

“You’re getting as tanned as though you had been at the sea-shore,” com-

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mented Mr. Churchill, as Elizabeth handed him his tea.

“Why should n’t she?” challenged Mrs. Trumbull. “Every one around here seems to think there is n’t any sun or blue sky at home. They act as though they did n’t dare breathe fresh air unless they pack up and go off a hundred miles. Lors! if you could see Beth racing round that tennis-court every day!”

“You ’ve taken up tennis again?” asked Mr. Churchill.

“Nance and I,” nodded Elizabeth, who was disappointed that Mrs. Trumbull had divulged the secret. She had planned to surprise her father in the fall, as well as her school friends.

“That ’s fine!” he exclaimed enthusiastically.

“It ’s Nance that makes it fine,” said Elizabeth. “Oh, Daddy, she ’s been awfully good!”

“It ’s six of one and half a dozen of the

Seizing his hand, Elizabeth drew him into the dining-room



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other," Mrs. Trumbull broke in. "But I must say Nance is a nice girl."

"I rather think all girls are nice when you get at them," smiled Mr. Churchill. "You look very homelike here, Beth."

"You think so, Daddy?"

That he did, he proved to her satisfaction, by the way he enjoyed his supper, and by staying until nearly nine o'clock. Even then he left reluctantly, and with many backward glances as Elizabeth stood at the door and watched him out of sight.

XIV

AN ACQUAINTANCE REAPPEARS

WITH every hour of every day occupied, the month of August sped by like a single week.

“I don’t see where the time goes!” Elizabeth exclaimed to Mrs. Trumbull, as the latter announced that it was the first day of September.

“I wonder about that twice every year; once in the fall, once in the spring,” said Mrs. Trumbull.

“I wonder about it every day,” laughed Elizabeth. “I wish there was a year between now and next month.”

“What happens then?”

“Nance goes back to school on the twentieth.”

“You need n’t look so sorrowful about

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that," Mrs. Trumbull said gently. "That is n't the end of her, is it?"

"No, only—well, I suppose it will give me more time for my French," said Elizabeth, grasping at the only consolation she could think of at the moment.

"And preservin' time will be here afore we know it," added Mrs. Trumbull.

"Preserving time?" questioned Elizabeth, not understanding.

"We ought to make some jelly and pickles, and put up some plums and grapes and quinces."

"I thought you bought those things all put up," said Elizabeth.

"Maybe some folks do, but I don't," answered Mrs. Trumbull. "What do you want to buy them for when the things are growin' all around you?"

"I don't know," answered Elizabeth, "only most people do."

"Most people are plumb lazy!" snapped Mrs. Trumbull. "No, sir! we 'll have

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our shelves full before snow flies. I know your father has n't had anything of the kind for fifteen years."

"We can have them for Thanksgiving!" exclaimed Elizabeth.

Mrs. Trumbull nodded.

"It 's time we were beginning now. Perhaps we can get around to it by next week."

"We might keep that to do for the week after," suggested Elizabeth. "I 'll want a lot to do then."

"There 's plenty to do all the time, if you do things right," said Mrs. Trumbull.

There was certainly plenty to do on this, the first day in the month, for Elizabeth, in the morning, tidied up the whole lower floor of the house, and finished the forenoon by making a cake. Immediately after luncheon, Mademoiselle Gagnon came for an hour, as she did three times a week. She had scarcely gone before Nance appeared.

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Elizabeth played an unusually good game that day, pressing Nance to her best and winning the first set by six four. It was the first time she had ever won against Nance.

“I told you I ’d beat you!” she exclaimed enthusiastically. “And oh, Nance, I ’ve done it! I ’ve done it!”

In her excited joy she gave a step or two that resembled an Indian war-dance. But Nance was looking serious.

“That ’s only one set,” she answered soberly.

“I know it, but think of winning even *one* set from you!” cried Elizabeth.

“It won’t count unless you win the second,” replied Nance.

The latter was seated on the wooden bench by the side-lines, nervously tapping her foot with her racket, anxious to begin again. She was really disturbed, for she always felt keenly every defeat. She was a girl who could be more generous to

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a defeated opponent than to a victorious one. In this case, remembering how short a time ago it was that Elizabeth could play scarcely at all, the defeat was particularly humiliating.

Elizabeth danced to her side and placed an arm about her.

“You don’t mind if I’m glad, Nance?” she asked.

“No,” answered Nance; “but I’m going to do my best to beat you this next set.”

“Then come on!” cried Elizabeth, flushed with victory. “I’ll try hard, but with no hard feeling!”

It was Nance’s serve, and she shot a fast ball over the net that completely baffled Elizabeth. Changing to the other court, she repeated the feat, making it thirty love. The third time she tried, she served twice into the net, but succeeded on the fourth attempt in making the score forty fifteen.

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By this time the smile had left Elizabeth's face. Her lips became firm, and she held herself alert. She stood back farther for the next serve, and succeeded in returning it. Nance swooped down upon the ball, and, attempting to drive it at full speed, drove it into the net. A moment later she made a double fault; and now with the score at deuce, Elizabeth again returned the serve and ran up to the net. Nance lobbed the ball, but Elizabeth recovered it and sent it back very deliberately along the side-lines for the advantage. Once again Nance attempted to win on the serve, and, putting her full strength into the strokes, shot two fast balls into the net, and lost the game.

She was by now thoroughly aroused, and waited eagerly for Elizabeth's straight serving in order to recoup. But, though Elizabeth attempted neither cut nor curve, there was considerable speed

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in her serve, and much precision. She varied the serve to the right and left of the court with an occasional slow ball that was extremely irritating. It dropped lightly over the net, and was very difficult to return for one who was waiting far back for a swift ball. It bounced low, and Nance, if she reached it, was pretty sure to return it out of bounds, because of her impetuosity. In the process, she not only lost her point, but more and more of her self-control. In this way, Elizabeth actually won the second game. This gave her such self-confidence that in the third game, where Nance steadied down a little, she lost only by a single point, and this was contested back and forth in a hard-fought rally.

“Good, Nance!” exclaimed Elizabeth, as her opponent finally succeeded in passing her.

A gentle handclapping came from the

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side-lines, and she looked around to see there a light-haired young man, whom, at first, she did not recognize. He stepped forward.

“I beg pardon,” he said with a smile. “May I interrupt the game long enough to inquire if you have completely recovered?”

“Recovered?” stammered Elizabeth.

“It’s rather a foolish question, is n’t it?” he faltered, as he noted her red cheeks. “I should have called before if I had not been away.”

It was not until then that Elizabeth brought to mind all the episode of the frightened horses at the country club.

“Oh! Mr. Crawford!” she laughed, extending her hand. “I remember now. But I was n’t hurt at all.”

He still looked so solicitous that, for a moment, Elizabeth felt concerned that she had received no injury worthy of his anx-

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iety. There was something foreign in his deferential courtesy and in the slight stoop of his shoulders.

"I am very glad," he answered. "I wasn't told that the horses were afraid of automobiles."

Elizabeth introduced the new-comer to Nance.

"I must n't interrupt your game," he apologized, with a bow.

"Our games are never finished," answered Elizabeth. "Will you not come to the house and meet Mrs. Trumbull?"

He hesitated.

"My house is just below here," she said, pointing to the house by the lane.

He glanced in that direction with some surprise. A bed of many-colored zinnias lent a touch of color to the quiet gray of the house, while the rose vine over the porch made it stand out like a cool oasis among the formal houses to be seen beyond.

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“May I?” he asked.

Elizabeth led the way across the fields, and, as she saw him still studying the cottage, she said:

“It’s a very old place. It was my mother’s.”

“Then I should n’t call that very old,” he answered.

“It must be twenty-five years old, at least.”

“Oh!” he exclaimed in surprise. “You don’t call that old—really?”

“What would *you* call old?”

“Why—five hundred years,” he answered.

“But the Pilgrims had n’t come over then, so a house could n’t be that old!” she exclaimed.

“I did n’t think of that,” he answered with a smile.

Mrs. Trumbull was somewhat surprised to see the girls returning with a stranger, but, as soon as Elizabeth ex-

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plained, the good lady greeted the lad cordially.

“Beth never told me a word about that scrape,” said Mrs. Trumbull. “I s’pose she misses death by a hair a dozen times a day that I don’t know anything about. It all comes of having those fool automobiles round loose.”

“I like horses better myself,” answered Crawford.

“Then you must have been brought up in the country,” declared Mrs. Trumbull.

“I was,” he admitted.

The girls excused themselves for a few moments to put their hair in order after their exercise; but Mrs. Trumbull, with her old-fashioned and informal hospitality to the guest who “happens in,” insisted that he should remain and share with them the lemonade and cake which she always had ready for the girls after the game. He watched her with interest as she made her preparations.

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“You don’t happen to be a State of Maine boy, do you?” she asked, with good-natured curiosity.

“No,” he answered.

“Vermont, perhaps?”

“No,” he answered. “I’m an Englishman.”

“An Englishman!” she exclaimed in astonishment.

“Yes,” he nodded. “I came over here for the summer, to see something of America. I’m going back to-morrow.”

“Well, well, well!” she murmured, quite confused for the moment over this revelation. “Then you visited Maine?”

He shook his head.

“I spent most of my time in New York and Chicago, and the rest of it on trains.”

“Land alive!” she protested, “do you call that seeing America!”

“I don’t know,” he replied wearily. “At any rate, I can’t say that I’m keen about what I saw. It all seems so new.”

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He gave a quick glance around the room.

“Do you know,” he added impulsively, “I like it here better than any place I’ve been.”

“Well, I reckon this is better than some places, anyhow,” she answered proudly. “And it’s all due to Beth. She likes it better than ‘The Towers,’ though she’s lived here only a few months.”

“It seems very homelike,” he said, boyishly. “I suppose that’s because I found most of my friends living in houses like hotels.”

“Like the big house yonder?” she asked.

“Yes,” he laughed, “I was afraid, at first, that Miss Churchill lived there.”

“No, siree!” answered Mrs. Trumbull. “She lives right here.”

At this point Beth and Nance returned, and the conversation became more gen-

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eral. They talked of tennis, and found that Crawford played.

“You must come out some day and have a set with Nance,” said Elizabeth.

“With Beth,” Nance corrected. “You saved me from being defeated to-day, Mr. Crawford.”

“No,” laughed Elizabeth, “you saved her from beating herself.”

“I’d like to play with both of you,” he assured them, “only I’m afraid I can’t. You see, I sail to-morrow.”

“Back to England, where he lives,” put in Mrs. Trumbull, a little proud of having already learned the fact.

“Then that’s why you didn’t think the house was very old!” exclaimed Elizabeth.

“It really does n’t seem very old compared with buildings that have been standing for four or five hundred years, does it?” he asked.

“Five hundred years!” exclaimed Mrs.

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Trumbull. "I must say that I should n't want to undertake keeping a house neat which was *that* old. Would you, Beth?"

Mr. Crawford laughed.

"You must come over sometime and see how we do it. You have visited England?"

"Once," answered Elizabeth; "but it seems as though we were either in hotels or trains most of the time."

"I know, I know," he replied quickly. "That's the trouble with visiting other countries, I fancy. But when you come again—will you let me show you another side of it?"

"Thank you," answered Elizabeth.

"And perhaps we can have our game over there," he added with a smile.

It was almost supper-time before he rose to go, and then it was with evident reluctance. This was one of those quick friendships which seem to cover months in a few hours. He left, promising to

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write, and exacting a promise from Mrs. Trumbull that if she ever visited England, she would let him know.

“But,” she assured him, “I’m too set, at my age, to go skylarkin’ around the world.”

So, in a single afternoon, the young stranger came and went. But as Mrs. Trumbull said to Elizabeth and Nance, who were eagerly discussing who he might be, “he’s the kind of lad that makes you feel that you are bound to see him again.”

XV

ROY'S RETURN

AS the opening day of school approached, Elizabeth grew more and more serious. She wanted to go back with Nance and begin again. For the first time in her life, she felt a desire to learn and to do for the sake of learning and doing, whereas, the year before, what little incentive she had sprang from pride alone. It was only the fear of appearing stupid that had made her study at all. But now, having proven her power in one direction, her ambition had been roused to excel in others.

The semi-victory over Nance in tennis brought it to a head. She laughed gaily to herself as she realized the surprise to her old friends this new acquisition of

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hers would be. She had made Nance promise not to breathe a word to any one of their practice during the summer. She laid awake nights picturing to herself how the girls would smile when she went upon the court, and the amazement which would follow should she beat one after another of the minor players. And she knew she *could* beat them. At times she felt as though she could beat even Nance—perhaps even Miss Winthrop. Ah, if she could win a game against Miss Winthrop!

And, after all, there was a good spirit back of these dreams. It was no self glorification she sought. Rather she seized upon the opportunity as a chance to redeem herself. She saw herself now as others had seen her, and it brought the hot color to her face. If they had looked upon her as proud and indolent, it had been her own fault. The spring tournament had aroused her somewhat,

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but it was the inspiration of Mrs. Trumbull and the house by the lane that had completed the work. One fared ill in attempting the rôle of pretty incompetence before Mrs. Trumbull.

Several times she was upon the point of asking her father to allow her to return to school, but in the end her pride checked her. It would n't be worth much coming that way. She must win the right to go back, as she wished to win other things, by her own ability.

Three days before school was to open, her father dropped in one evening for supper. He watched her with unusual keenness as she presided at the table, and later as, with Mrs. Trumbull, she made the dining-room and kitchen tidy for the night. Even after they had gone into the sitting-room, he said nothing until he was about to leave. Then he asked, as casually as though it were an every-day matter:

ROY'S RETURN

"Elizabeth, would you like to go back to school this fall?"

"Daddy!" she exclaimed.

"I've had a talk with Miss Grimshawe, and I've told her that it's the Lady of the Lane and not the Lady of 'The Towers' I wish to enroll. Am I right?"

Elizabeth for a moment hung her head. The comparison brought back very vividly that first episode, now almost forgotten.

"Look up, my daughter," said Mr. Churchill. "I want you to understand that I'm very proud of you!"

Mrs. Trumbull rose and placed her arm about the drooping figure.

"I won't have her shamed by no one," she asserted aggressively. "If Miss Grimshawe or any one else dares—"

"But Miss Grimshawe wants her very much," he said reassuringly to Mrs. Trumbull.

He turned to his daughter.

THE LADY OF THE LANE

“I think that, in spite of everything, she has a warm place in her heart for you, Elizabeth.”

“She’d better have,” Mrs. Trumbull warned.

“What do you say, Beth?”

“I’ll be very, very glad to go back, Daddy!” she exclaimed. “Only—it does n’t mean giving up the home, does it?”

“It would hurt me very much if you wanted to give up that,” he answered.

And so, after Elizabeth had cried a moment on her father’s shoulder, and Mrs. Trumbull was through sputtering about Miss Grimshawe, the matter was all settled.

“I suppose you will need some new clothes, Beth,” said her father. “Perhaps Mrs. Trumbull had better go into town with you to-morrow and help you pick out what you need.”

ROY'S RETURN

Elizabeth finished her shopping in a very few hours, where, a year ago, it would have taken her several days. Somehow gowns did not seem to count for so much now. What she did select she chose with her usual good taste.

She told the news to Nance when the latter came that afternoon, and Nance was almost as delighted about it as Elizabeth herself.

“Then you ’ll enter the tournament, after all!” exclaimed Nance, when they had talked over several other matters. “But, Beth, I hope you are n’t drawn against me in the preliminaries.”

“Why not?” asked Elizabeth with a smile.

“Because it ’s going to make me feel just as bad to beat you, as to be beaten by you. I ’ve half a mind to keep out of it this fall.”

“Nonsense!” answered Elizabeth.

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“That would n’t be fair to either of us. I guess we can both stand a beating now and then, if it comes to that.”

“I know,” Nance answered slowly. “But—well, there’s no use trying to cross a bridge before we come to it. Anyhow, we must practise hard these next few weeks. Are you too tired to have a game this afternoon?”

“Why should I be tired?” asked Elizabeth.

“You said you were shopping all the morning.”

Elizabeth made a wry face at the recollection.

“The first time I ever get tired shopping, I’m going to stop doing it,” she answered.

“Good!” laughed Nance. “Then come on. Mr. Crawford won’t be here to watch us to-day.”

“Did n’t you like him?” asked Beth, as they started arm in arm for the court.

ROY'S RETURN

"Well enough," answered Nance.
"He seemed rather foreign."

But it happened that, even with Mr. Crawford on the high seas, they did not find themselves free from interruption. Before the first ball was served, Elizabeth heard a familiar voice, and turned to find herself facing Roy Thornton. Tanned and ruddy, he strode toward her, with—first of all—a surprised greeting to Nance.

"Mrs. Trumbull said you were up here," he explained. "I couldn't help coming over, even though—"

He paused and studied Elizabeth a moment, as though to learn just what her attitude toward him might be. She looked uneasy, but he caught a smile about the corners of her mouth that encouraged him.

"'Shake, please!' as we boys say. Won't you?" he said, extending his hand; and she obeyed.

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"I'm glad to see you again, and I'm glad to see you out here."

He crossed to Nance.

"You, too, Nance!" he added. "You both look as though you had been at it all summer."

"And you had a pleasant summer?" Elizabeth asked, anxious to change the subject.

"Fine!" he answered enthusiastically. "Wenham, Harden, and I took a walking trip through New England."

"That must have been good fun," said Nance.

"Great! We started without a cent, and worked our way—just to see if we could do it. But—excuse me! I'm interrupting your game; I'll watch a minute, if I may. Do go on!"

"I'd rather hear more about your trip," Elizabeth said hastily. "Would n't you, Nance?"

Nance, understanding Elizabeth's mo-

ROY'S RETURN

tive in not wishing to play before Roy, nodded. But the latter would not hear of their giving up the game.

"If you won't play, I'll go," he said decidedly. "The story can wait, but you are n't always sure of such tennis weather as this."

There seemed to be no alternative. They had either to play or let him go, so Elizabeth reluctantly picked up the balls. While doing this, however, she found a chance to whisper to Nance:

"Don't you dare speak, no matter how badly I play!"

Elizabeth took her position, and with an awkward swoop of her racket, sent the first ball spinning twenty feet out of the court. The next one she served into the net. She made herself as awkward as possible, and, when it came time for Nance to serve, acted just as ridiculously in trying to return the ball. Nance began to laugh, and soon reached a point where she

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could not control herself. As a result, she played about as badly as Elizabeth.

"Oh, look here, Beth," protested Roy, "take things easier."

This was just after she had run under a gentle lob from Nance, missing it entirely.

But Elizabeth was able to keep up the farce no longer. "I don't feel much like playing to-day," she said. "I'm not doing at all well."

"Oh, you must n't get discouraged, Beth!" Roy said seriously. "I wish you'd let me come up and play with you some day."

"I'm afraid I'd give you as dull a game as poor Nance has had to endure," she replied.

"We'll arrange for it some Saturday, shall we?"

"I'll see," she answered, without committing herself. "But I expect to be very

ROY'S RETURN

busy. School begins Monday, and that, with my housework—”

“You’re going back to school?” he exclaimed.

She nodded, though her cheeks turned scarlet, for a second, at the word “back.”

“Good! that’s great!” he went on, and added in explanation, “somehow it made you seem awfully grown up, not being in school.”

The three returned to the house by the lane, and there Roy was persuaded to tell more of his summer adventures.

“We wanted to see if we could n’t be as good pioneers as our great-grandfathers were,” he said, “so we started from Portland to find out just how far we could work our way. It was easy enough. We chopped wood, helped with the haying, and lived like kings. I guess we could have kept on going clear to the Pacific Ocean, if we’d had time.”

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"I 'll wager you could," agreed Mrs. Trumbull.

But it was only bit by bit that he was induced to tell the interesting details of the experiment. In fact, they kept cropping out all winter.

"Don't forget about the tennis game," he said, as he was leaving.

"Oh, Beth!" exclaimed Nance, when they were alone, "I—I tried not to laugh."

"I don't know that it was a very nice thing to do," Elizabeth apologized, "but I didn't want to give away my secret just then. And I *won't* play with him until after the tournament."

"I would n't, if I wanted to keep the secret," laughed Nance. "I don't believe you could play so outrageously a second time."

In many ways, Elizabeth dreaded the ordeal of that first day at school, but when the time came, to her surprise she found

ROY'S RETURN

it no ordeal at all. Miss Grimshawe greeted her with a cordiality that, in a moment, effaced all memory of the past. Neither in word nor manner did she in any way refer to it. And little Miss Santier actually wept at sight of Elizabeth.

“Cherie! cherie!” she choked, “the school was n’t the same without you.”

And when Elizabeth answered her in very good French, the little woman was forced once again to wipe her eyes.

But with the girls it was another matter. There was a great deal of gossip which, as usual, started with the Brookfield pair. The latter, in new frocks, bought abroad, held their chins high and vouchsafed Elizabeth nothing but a nod in passing. It might have hurt had she not known her chance was coming—a chance which came before a week had passed, with the opening of the fall tennis tournament.

XVI

ELIZABETH PLAYS MISS WINTHROP

WHEN the entries for the tournament were posted in the school corridor, and Elizabeth Churchill's name led all the rest, the Brookfield girls could hardly believe their eyes. But there was no denying that her name was there, written in her own firm, round handwriting. They called the attention of several other girls to the strange fact, whereupon there followed much giggling.

"It will be worth watching; won't it, Jane?" Helen observed.

"Why, she can't play at all; can she, Helen?"

"I call it very bold of her even to try," answered Helen.

But if they were surprised that Eliza-

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beth was daring enough to enter the contest, their astonishment knew no bounds when, after drawing, it was found that she was pitted in the preliminaries against no less a player than Miss Winthrop herself, and intended to fight it out.

“I heard her say so!” exclaimed Helen to an excited group of eager inquirers. “I was standing close by when Miss Winthrop came up and asked her if she did n’t mean to forfeit the set. And Elizabeth answered, as cool as you please, ‘No, I mean to play it.’ Those were her very words; were n’t they, Jane?”

Jane nodded.

“And Miss Winthrop turned as red as a beet, and said she thought Elizabeth might want to save herself the trouble.”

“And Elizabeth said, ‘No trouble at all,’ ” put in Jane.

“Just like that,” nodded Helen. “‘It’s no trouble at all, Miss Winthrop.’ ”

A chorus of exclamations and giggles

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greeted this, interrupted by the arrival of Nance at the bulletin board. As the latter saw the result of the drawing, her face grew serious.

“What do you think of that, Nance?” demanded Helen.

“Of what?” answered Nance.

“Why, of Elizabeth Churchill daring to play Miss Winthrop. She refused to forfeit the set, you know.”

“I’d be ashamed of her if she did,” answered Nance, her spirit and her color rising.

“You don’t mean to say she has a chance?” exclaimed Helen.

“You can tell better after the game,” replied Nance, hurrying away. She found Elizabeth at her desk, reviewing her morning lessons.

“It’s hard luck, Beth,” she said in a whisper.

“What is?” demanded Elizabeth.

“Drawing Miss Winthrop at the start.”

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"Pooh! I don't mind at all," Elizabeth answered with a smile. "Do you know she wanted me to back out?"

"I know. Helen is spreading it all over the school."

"She is, is she?" answered Elizabeth, her lips growing firm. Then she laughed. "All right. Just you wait, Nance! Honestly, I think I can play better against Miss Winthrop than against any one in school. I 'll be fresh and sure of myself, and she 'll be a little over-confident. You see if she is n't. I 'd rather play her than you. And I 'll beat her."

"Good! good!" exclaimed Nance. "Oh, Beth, but the game will be worth seeing!"

"It will be worth playing anyhow," answered Elizabeth.

When Roy heard the news, he came over to the little house by the lane.

"They tell me you drew Miss Winthrop in the preliminaries, Beth, and that you

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are going to play her!" he exclaimed excitedly.

"Why not?" asked Elizabeth, with a smile.

"My stars, but you 're game!" he cried delightedly.

"Is n't it what you would do?" she asked.

"Every time!" he answered. "I don't believe in being whipped before you are—no matter what the odds. But, Beth, today is Monday and the tournament is n't until Saturday. If you *could* get in a little practice before then."

"I shall," she answered coolly. "Nance has promised to come over every afternoon."

"Then you don't want me?" he asked.

"Thank you, Roy. It is good of you to offer, but I 've been playing with Nance all summer, you know."

"Yes, I know," he answered, somewhat crestfallen.

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“And I really can play better than I did the other day,” she assured him.

“I want you to do your best, Beth,” he replied seriously, and as though he did not have much confidence in that statement.

“I ’ll do that, anyhow,” she answered lightly. “You ’ll be at the game?”

“Helen Brookfield invited me,” he answered significantly.

Elizabeth flushed.

“And Wenham and Harden are coming down for over Sunday with me. But, Beth—”

“Yes,” said Elizabeth as he hesitated.

“I won’t come if you’d rather I would n’t.”

“You ’re afraid I may disgrace myself?”

He turned away, more embarrassed than he had ever been in his life. Then he faced her again with his hand extended.

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"No," he said. "Because I know you'll do your best, and when a fellow does that, he's done all he can."

"Then you'd better come," she answered with a smile.

The day of the tournament turned out to be fair and crisp—ideal weather for playing. The whole school was present, for the stand Elizabeth had taken was the chief topic of discussion throughout the week. The Brookfield girls arrived late, and took positions on the side-lines next to Roy and his two friends; but after the greetings were over, Roy gave his whole attention to the field and forgot the girls. He was decidedly worried. Even admitting that Elizabeth could play better than he had seen her play, even admitting the fighting blood in her which would lead her to play her best, it did n't seem within the bounds of possibility that she could offset the skill and experience of as clever a player as Miss Winthrop. And, when

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the latter stepped out on the court, he knew that Elizabeth could expect no mercy. It was certainly plucky of Beth to stick to her determination to play, but also, it seemed to Roy, decidedly fool-hardy. For one thing, he knew that, in her first attempt, she would take a beating very much to heart, and it might destroy her confidence for a long time to come. He wished sincerely that she had drawn a less experienced antagonist.

When Elizabeth appeared, however, he led the applause, and urged Wenham and Harden to do their best. The crowd, always, if unconsciously, in sympathy with the weaker, took it up, and gave Beth a brave greeting. But if she heard it, she gave no sign. Her face was tense, and her lips tightly closed. She showed no trace of nervousness as she took her position, but it was evident that she was under a strain.

Miss Winthrop won the toss, and chose

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the serve, there being no advantage in either court. She began with a vicious cut that sent the ball off to one side, where it bounded at a sharp angle. It was slower and more baffling than anything Nance served, and bothered Elizabeth. She missed the first three points, which made the score forty love.

“Too bad,” muttered Roy.

Harden, who had been watching her carefully, heard him. “She’s studying that out,” he said. “I have a notion she ’ll master it in a moment.”

Elizabeth stepped in a little closer, and nearer the middle of the court, where she could jump either to the right or left, the ball having invariably struck close to the side-lines. This time she returned it without, however, a very close calculation as to direction. Miss Winthrop ran up to the net and volleyed back, but Elizabeth was ready, and sent it along the side-lines for a neat pass.



The tennis game

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“Good! good!” exclaimed Roy, and led a vigorous applause.

Miss Winthrop changed her next serve to a swift, straight ball, but this was the kind that Nance had been using largely, so that it was easier for Elizabeth than the cut. As Miss Winthrop ran to the net, Elizabeth lobbed the ball over her head. Miss Winthrop reached it, but, by that time, Elizabeth herself was at the net and turned it one side at a sharp angle, thereby winning her second point.

Somewhat nettled, Miss Winthrop returned to her cutting serve, and succeeded in winning her final point and the game. But both Miss Winthrop and the gallery began to realize that this was not to be quite the farce that both had anticipated.

When it came Elizabeth's turn to serve, she sent a straight line ball, hitting it with a full-arm swing that gave it great speed. Miss Winthrop was not looking for this. It sped past her before she had even

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swung for it. On the second ball, she moved farther back, but that time Elizabeth, with the same motion, served one of her easy ones, which barely dropped over the net. Once again Miss Winthrop was taken completely by surprise. Mortified by having been so deceived, she lost her head at the next serve, and, swinging wildly for it, sent it into the net. She did better on the fourth ball, but, with a pretty return, slow and accurate, Elizabeth placed the ball just out of her reach, making the score in games one to one.

But this was only the beginning of one of the hardest-fought and most exciting contests that the school ever witnessed. The experience of Miss Winthrop helped her to win the first set, but she was forced to use every trick and every ounce of strength at her command. And when she began the second set, it was like having to begin all over again, for she found her antagonist just as fresh, just as steady,

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just as determined as at the start. Elizabeth was neither disheartened nor excited. She proceeded to take advantage at once of all she had learned in the first set, correcting the faults she had then made, and forcing Miss Winthrop hardest where she had discovered the latter's weakness. She was especially successful in teasing her opponent with slow balls. Miss Winthrop could not resist the temptation that they offered to attempt kill shots, and, being accustomed to fast playing, almost invariably made a fault. By the middle of the set, which stood four-two in Elizabeth's favor, the latter resorted almost wholly to this game, returning the balls slowly, but with rare accuracy and judgment, and waiting for Miss Winthrop to beat herself.

Roy fathomed Elizabeth's tactics and glanced at Harden. The latter nodded his appreciation.

"That's great head-work," he said.

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"And it's head-work that wins any game!" exclaimed Roy. "Miss Winthrop is getting rattled."

It certainly looked that way, and the fact that she knew that, after all, she was playing with an inferior player, added to her confusion. In the last three games, she went to pieces completely, while Elizabeth, steadily and coolly, took full advantage of her opponent's slightest faults. The set went to Elizabeth at six-two.

Roy could hardly contain himself.

"It's wonderful!" he exclaimed. "I don't understand how she does it!"

"I think she has been very lucky," suggested Helen.

"Lucky!" returned Roy, hotly. "There's no luck in such playing as that! If there's anything besides clean tennis, it's grit!"

For the third and final set, Elizabeth once again took her place with no trace

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either of fatigue or nervousness, while Miss Winthrop looked decidedly worried and a trifle exhausted. She was paying for her wildness with both mental and physical fatigue. But now she went to another extreme and played with such excessive caution as to place her strictly on the defense. Elizabeth, on the other hand, in this third set played more aggressively than she had at any time before. She used more speed and took chances as she had not dared to do before. She kept Miss Winthrop running from one end of the court to the other, until the latter was in utter rout. The set went to Elizabeth at six-two, the last game being a love game.

Elizabeth hurried up to Miss Winthrop to shake hands. "I'm glad I won," she said heartily; "but I'm sorry you lost."

"I didn't expect to lose, but I know I deserved to," answered Miss Winthrop.

Roy, Wenham, and Harden rushed up to

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Elizabeth with congratulations, Nance close at their heels. Through eyes shining with joy, Elizabeth thanked them in some way, and then, with Nance's arm about her, sought the club-house.

"Beth, you did wonderfully!" exclaimed Nance.

XVII

AN OLD-FASHIONED HALLOWE'EN PARTY

ELIZABETH'S victory over Miss Winthrop was the talk of the school on Monday morning, but, before noon, she had furnished them with another topic for discussion, when she announced that she intended to forfeit her game with Miss Currier, a player very much inferior to Miss Winthrop. To all the questions excitedly asked of her, she only smiled and shook her head. But Nance knew the reason, and heartily disapproved of it. She herself had won her first game easily, and it was conceded that she would have no more difficulty with her next opponent than Elizabeth would have with Miss Currier. This, of course, would bring them into the finals against each other.

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“You ought n’t to drop out,” protested Nance. “It’s like giving me the championship, and there’s no fun getting it that way.”

“I can’t help it, Nance,” Elizabeth answered, determinedly. “I’d feel just as badly beating you as I would being beaten by you, and that’s all there is to it, my dear girl!”

“I don’t think it’s quite sportsman-like,” frowned Nance.

“Perhaps it is n’t,” Elizabeth agreed readily. “But it’s a fact.”

She placed her arm around her chum’s shoulder.

“Don’t be vexed, Nance,” she pleaded. “I have n’t played much, you know, and so when I play, I play hard. It seemed cruel to force Miss Winthrop when she was all tired out. I’d never forgive myself if I played you that way, and it would n’t be tennis any other way, would it?”

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“No,” admitted Nance.

“Then let’s not talk any more about it.”

“All right,” agreed Nance with a smile.
“We won’t.”

And she did n’t, but, on the following Saturday, she did not appear on the courts, and so lost her own set by forfeit.

“What’s the matter with you two girls, anyway?” demanded Roy, when he next met them.

“Some day we’re going to play off the match in private,” answered Elizabeth.

“Say—you’ll let me umpire?”

“No, sir!” laughed Elizabeth. “There won’t be a single soul to watch us!”

During the next few weeks the school became about evenly divided between one group, centering around Elizabeth and Nance, and a second group which hovered around the Brookfield girls. Elizabeth herself, however, was far too busy, be-

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tween her school and home duties, to give much thought to this.

Mrs. Trumbull had feared that Elizabeth, once back in her old circle, would lose interest in her home, but the direct contrary seemed to be the fact. The more she was out of the little house by the lane, the keener was her delight in returning to it. She went about her tasks with renewed zeal. Though Mrs. Trumbull, under the circumstances, thought it might be too heavy a burden for Elizabeth to carry the latter refused to shirk a single duty. She was up as early as usual, and prepared the breakfast. Upon her return from school, Mrs. Trumbull had luncheon ready for her, but Elizabeth insisted upon preparing dinner and in devoting Saturday forenoon to setting the house in order.

"It would n't seem like my home if I did n't," said Elizabeth, when Mrs. Trum-

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bull expressed concern lest the work be too much for her.

“Well, I must say you don’t make much fuss about it,” Mrs. Trumbull replied resignedly.

So late October came. The trees, after their harlequin carnival of the past few weeks, stood shivering beneath the cold fall blasts. The ground was strewn with leaves which rustled over the ground like whispering children. The frost-bitten pea-vines and a few dry corn-stalks were all that was left of the garden after the garnering of the crops. Except the golden pumpkins. Those stood out like miniature suns warming the whole desolate district. But in the cellar of the little house by the lane were full bins and barrels, and shelf upon shelf of tightly sealed jars.

But now, with these harvest tasks completed, Elizabeth was ready to put into

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effect a plan that had been in her mind ever since school opened.

"I want to give a housewarming," she announced to Mrs. Trumbull. "I think that, for some reason, half the girls are afraid to call here, and so I'm going to invite them all, and introduce them to my home."

"Who cares whether they come or not?" demanded Mrs. Trumbull.

"Oh," laughed Elizabeth, "I want them. I'd like this to be a sort of gathering place for all my friends."

"Well, it would be a good way to find out who are your friends and who are n't, anyway," declared Mrs. Trumbull.

"I don't even care about that," answered Elizabeth. "I'm friends with all of them, whether they are with me or not. I thought Hallowe'en would be a good time to begin."

"So it would," agreed Mrs. Trumbull.

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“Your mother always had a party Hallowe’en.”

That afternoon Roy dropped in and Elizabeth told him of her plan.

“Fine!” he exclaimed. “This is just the place for a Hallowe’en party. You can’t have a real one in an apartment-house, any more than you can have a real Thanksgiving in the city.”

“I may have to call upon you to help me,” she hinted.

“I’d like nothing better,” he answered.

“Then I’ll make out a list right away, and perhaps you and Nance can help me address the envelops.”

“I don’t star as a penman,” he answered. “But I’ll stick the stamps for you.”

A few days later, Roy, Nance, and Elizabeth were seated at their task in the sitting-room. Elizabeth had included in her list all her boy friends, and many that

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Roy had suggested, as well as all the girls in school of her own age. As Roy came to the names of the Brookfield girls, he scowled.

"I suppose you had to ask them," he said.

"Yes," she answered with a laugh. "Really, I don't want to quarrel with any one, Roy, and I thought that if they came and had a good time—"

"Supposing they don't come?" he demanded.

"Oh, I'm sure they'll come if only to make fun," answered Elizabeth. "They've no business to do that," he growled.

"Well, they have n't done it yet," returned Elizabeth, good-naturedly. "We must n't scold them beforehand."

"I'm afraid of their tricks," said Roy. "They are so clever about such things that you never know what they'll be up to next."

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"I'm not afraid of them," answered Elizabeth. "And I do hope they will come and have a good time."

"They would n't admit they had a good time if they came," answered Roy.

He would n't have expressed his opinion to any one else, but he was as frank with Elizabeth as with his mother. He had met the two Brookfield girls only a few days before, and they had suggested that some one ought to arrange a Hallowe'en party. He had hinted then, as broadly as he dared, that Elizabeth had something of the sort in mind. He had n't liked the expression in Helen's eyes as he told her this. It had left him with the feeling that he would have done better not even to have hinted. With this in mind, he tossed back to Elizabeth the envelop intended for Jane and Helen.

"You address this," he said briefly.

When he left that afternoon, he took all the invitations with him, and mailed

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them at the postoffice. In the evening Mr. Churchill came over from "The Towers," and Elizabeth told him more fully her plans, of which he had already approved.

"I want to make it just like one of Mother's parties," she confided to him. "So now I want you to tell me everything you two used to do on Hallowe'en."

Elizabeth brought her chair closer to him so that she could rest her head upon his shoulder. He placed his arm about her. Mrs. Trumbull sat sewing on the other side of the fire. The setting was just as it was twenty years before. When he began to speak, it was with the worry of half-a-dozen business problems still clouding his brain, but as he went on, these were all forgotten. They were forgotten as they used to be in those days when business was always of secondary interest to the house by the lane and the home for which it stood. Then it was life

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and peace and happiness which counted most, and an event like one of these parties was to be remembered, even in the face of his biggest schemes for the getting of a fortune. So he sat for an hour telling of the decorations and the games and the people, until Elizabeth felt as though she herself had been one of the former guests.

“Oh, Daddy!” she exclaimed when he had finished, “I wish I had been there, too.”

He patted her head.

“It does n’t do much good to wish for impossibilities,” put in Mrs. Trumbull.

“No,” agreed Mr. Churchill.

“And I say we ought to be planning for the party to come.”

“Right!” nodded Mr. Churchill. “For the party to come will soon be the party that is gone, and we must have pleasant memories of that, too.”

Elizabeth sat up.

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“My party is all planned,” she declared. “I’m going to have everything just as Mother had it.”

“Now that is n’t a bad idea,” said Mrs. Trumbull, looking up from her sewing.

“But I shall need you to help me, Daddy.”

“I ’ll do what I can,” he agreed.

“Then—let me see. To-day is Tuesday, and the thirty-first comes on Saturday. Will you come home early, so that I may have you the whole afternoon?”

He hesitated.

“I ’m afraid—” he began.

“Daddy,” she broke in, “you know I shall need you to hang all the high things.”

“There ’s Martin,” he suggested.

“I shall need you—you and no one but you,” she pleaded.

Still he hesitated, for he had at least one important business engagement for that afternoon, but, as he lifted his eyes,

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he caught in Mrs. Trumbull's glance a worried look that decided him.

"All right!" he submitted, "I 'll be here at two o'clock."

Elizabeth sprang to her feet.

"Now," she declared, "I 'm sure my party will be a success!"

But the next morning, Elizabeth received in the mail a little square envelop that took away her breath. On the surface it was inoffensive enough, but reading between the lines, it sounded like a declaration of war. It read as follows:

The Misses Brookfield desire the honor of Miss Elizabeth Churchill's company on Hallowe'en night, October thirty-first, at eight o'clock.

R. S. V. P.

APTHWAITE COURT.

The Misses Brookfield must have received her own invitation that very morning. To be sure, this conflict might have been accidental, but something made Elizabeth recall Roy's words of warning.

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But whether accidental or not, this made a very embarrassing situation. There was no doubt that both had invited about the same people. They had many friends in common, both at Miss Grimshawe's and at Roy's school. The two invitations would reach the same people at the same time, and this would leave them nothing to do but choose.

Elizabeth hurried into the kitchen with the letter and showed it to Mrs. Trumbull. The latter adjusted her steel-bowed spectacles and read it through.

“Well!” she exclaimed. “Of all the mean tricks I ever heard of, this is the worst!”

“But we don't know for sure that it is a trick,” Elizabeth protested charitably, though with her heart in her boots.

“Of course it 's a trick,” answered Mrs. Trumbull, impatiently. “You wait until Roy sees this!”

AN OLD-FASHIONED PARTY

“I suppose it means that I ’d better give up my party,” faltered Elizabeth.

“Huh?” demanded Mrs. Trumbull, making herself as straight as a ramrod.

“I suppose—”

“Don’t you suppose nothing of the kind,” Mrs. Trumbull broke in. “We ’ll have this party if every one else in the city gives one the same night! We ’re sure of three, anyway.”

“Who?” asked Elizabeth.

“Roy Thornton, Nance, and your dad. They are worth more than all the rest of them put together.”

“Perhaps—perhaps Roy won’t come,” suggested Elizabeth.

“Won’t, eh?” exclaimed Mrs. Trumbull. “Well, I ’d be willing to stake my life on it!”

That night Elizabeth received five regrets—all from her girl friends. But the next morning she received as many ac-

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ceptances, and these, oddly enough, were all from boys. On Friday came more regrets and more acceptances, again divided as before. Elizabeth was mystified, but she went on with her preparations with as good a heart as possible. All day Friday both she and Mrs. Trumbull were busy in the kitchen. They made cake and dough-nuts and pumpkin-pies. In addition to this, Elizabeth made fudge and walnut creams. Martin had plenty to do cracking nuts and hollowing out the pumpkins, cutting eyes, noses, and mouths in them, and preparing the candles. From the beginning, Mrs. Trumbull had insisted that if this was to be an old-fashioned Hallowe'en party, everything must be made at home. Mr. Churchill had suggested that the chef be allowed to make some of the pastries, but Mrs. Trumbull would n't listen a minute to that.

"No, siree!" she said. "This is going to be an American party, and my notion

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of an American party is where you put something of yourself into it."

"If I might make so bold as to say so, that's an English party, too," observed Martin.

"Well, Englishmen are only Americans who have n't come over here," returned Mrs. Trumbull.

Elizabeth had very good luck with her candy. The fudge was smooth and firm, while the creams were every whit as good as any she could have bought in town. So was the cake, for that matter, and the caramel frosting would melt in your mouth.

Elizabeth received a note that day from Roy, saying that, with the foot-ball team and his studies, he would n't be able to come over and help, and that Saturday he was to play.

"I 'd ask you to come to the game," he concluded, "but I know you 'll be too busy. The whole team is looking forward to the

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party, and I'm coming over early Saturday evening to help you with the finishing touches. Hooray for you!"

The whole team! Elizabeth was still pretty much confused as to what was going on about the two gatherings. So far, not a girl had accepted, while every boy she had asked had written his enthusiastic thanks. She was too busy to worry much about this, but it certainly looked queer.

The next afternoon her father, true to his promise, appeared shortly before two o'clock, ready for work. She pinned a blue apron over his business suit, to make him feel that he really had a great deal to do, and then ordered him to sit down while she and Martin festooned the windows with long strips of yellow paper.

"What I want you to do, Daddy," she explained, with an airy wave of her hand, "is to sort of oversee things."

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“Look here,” he protested, “I want to do more than that!”

“Then,” she permitted, “you may hold the hammer and tacks.”

But that did not suit him either, and in less than a minute, he was mounting the step-ladder and doing the actual work, while she herself was overseeing the job, and Martin was holding the tacks. They draped the windows with the yellow paper, and ran it all around the room. From this they suspended long strips which reached to the floor. The idea was to produce the color effect of an autumn corn-field, and, to make it more real, Martin brought in several large stacks of the dried corn-stalks, which were placed in the corners. In each of the front windows one of the hollowed-out pumpkins was placed ready for the lighted candles. The orchestra contributed by Mr. Churchill as his share was to be half concealed in a recess.

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From opposite corners of the room stout cords were stretched, and from one of these, suspended on strings, were a half-dozen apples, and from the other half a half-dozen doughnuts. Then Martin brought in two large tubs, half filled with water, for the apple-bobbing contest. There still remained the dining-room to be decorated in much the same fashion as the front room, the dishes to be brought out, and the sandwiches to be made. You may be sure that every one was as busy as possible until it was time to dress for the evening. And no one was happier in the work than Mr. Churchill himself.

In a half-hour, Elizabeth was ready to receive her friends, while Mrs. Trumbull needed less time to don her black silk and twist her gray locks into a tight pug.

When Elizabeth came down-stairs, Roy was waiting with a box of yellow jonquils. She tucked one of these in her hair, and

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wore the others at her waist. She looked like a young and very charming goddess of the harvest.

“I came early to see what I could do,” said Roy. “And—and—I suppose you know the Brookfield girls are giving a party to-night.”

“Yes,” answered Elizabeth, with a smile, “I received an invitation.”

“So did I. So did all the boys.”

“So did all the girls,” added Elizabeth.

“I know it. But—well, you wait and see what happens.”

“I know one thing that will happen,” answered Elizabeth, good-naturedly, “I’m afraid the boys who come here won’t have many dance partners.”

“So?” grinned Roy. “I ’ll bet my hat that the girls at the Brookfield party won’t either.”

“Roy,” exclaimed Elizabeth, “I hope you did n’t do anything to make the boys come here.”

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“Make them?” returned Roy. “You could n’t have kept them away.”

Just at this moment, Nance arrived, and fifteen minutes later, promptly at eight o’clock, the doorbell rang, and Martin, proud in his old regalia of “The Towers,” swung open the front door. Not one boy, but sixteen, filed in like a well-drilled regiment. In greeting her guests and in presenting them to Nance, Elizabeth found her hands full, and, these preliminaries over, the party ran itself. Never did boys have a better time, and, for that matter, never did Elizabeth. She felt like a queen in the midst of her court. It seemed as though each boy vied with the others in his attentions to Nance and herself. For an hour, all struggled strenuously for the honors of the Hallowe’en contests, and then the floor was cleared for the dance. Seven of the boys bound their arms with handkerchiefs and acted as girls. Roy led the

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grand march with Elizabeth, Grandon, the little quarter-back, seized Mrs. Trumbull and insisted that she follow as his partner, while Sears came after with Nance. The sport waxed merrier and merrier from that moment on. Two-steps, waltzes, quadrilles, and Virginia reels followed in quick succession; Mrs. Trumbull had not danced so much in thirty years, but no boy would be satisfied until he had her, as well as Elizabeth and Nance, for a partner. In the midst of the gaiety Mr. Churchill himself appeared, and joined in as though no older than the others.

When it came to the spread, every member of the foot-ball team—and they were there to a man—broke training. Doughnuts, pie, and cake vanished as though by magic; sandwiches appeared only to disappear; and as for Elizabeth's candy, it stood no more chance than snow-flakes before the sun.

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It was eleven o'clock before the merriment ceased, and the boys reluctantly took their departure, vowing they had never had a better time in all their lives. They filed out in a body, and, as the door closed behind them, Elizabeth threw her arms about her father's neck.

"Oh, Daddy!" she cried, "it *was* a success!"

"Hark!" he answered.

She heard Roy's voice:

"Now—all together, boys!"

Sharp as the crack of a machine-gun the school yell rang out in the night air, ending with:

"Miss Churchill! Miss Churchill! Miss Churchill!"

"Who 's all right?" demanded Grandon.

"Elizabeth Churchill!" came the enthusiastic answer from seventeen strong throats.



The sport waxed merrier and merrier

XVIII

ELIZABETH'S DREAMS COME TRUE

THOUGH Elizabeth made no mention of the party at school next day, it was clear that, among the other girls, the two affairs were being discussed in whispers. They talked more freely with Nance, and she did not hesitate to paint in glowing colors the success of the party in the house by the lane. On the whole, however, most of the girls appeared rather sheepish, and avoided the subject.

That afternoon Elizabeth was very much surprised to receive a call from Miss Winthrop.

“Elizabeth,” the latter began abruptly, “I’ve come to apologize.”

“For what?” asked Elizabeth.

“For joining in Helen’s plan, which was

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meant to hurt you," she answered without mincing matters. "Helen admits her party was a failure. Do you know there was n't a single boy there except two relatives?"

Elizabeth smiled.

"Do you know, there was n't a single girl at my party except Nance and myself?" she asked.

"Yes," Miss Winthrop confessed. "We ought every one of us to be ashamed!"

"You need n't be," answered Elizabeth. "I was sorry you did n't come, for I wanted you all there, but, of course, Helen wanted you, too."

"But she did n't," Miss Winthrop replied. "She just wanted to spoil your party. She says so herself, and—and she wanted me to tell you so, and to say she is sorry."

"Helen wanted you to say that!" exclaimed Elizabeth.

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“We all talked it over at recess, and decided it was the only thing to do. She ought to have come herself, but you know how hard that would be for her.”

“It would n’t be so hard as she thinks,” answered Elizabeth. “I would have understood and forgiven her, and I *do* forgive her.”

Miss Winthrop’s eyes grew moist.

“How dear and good and generous you are!” she exclaimed impulsively.

“I don’t deserve that praise,” answered Elizabeth. “But I don’t have time to quarrel any more. You see, I have so much to do here.”

Miss Winthrop glanced around the pretty room.

“You’re certainly lucky,” she answered. “I wish the rest of us had a chance to learn what you are learning here.”

Elizabeth leaned forward and placed her hand on Miss Winthrop’s knee.

“Do you, honestly?” she asked.

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“Honestly!”

“Then listen,” she began breathlessly. “I’ve been thinking over something ever since school opened. It may sound foolish to you, and if it does, I want you to say so right out. Will you?”

“I guess we’d be better off all the time if we always said things right out,” agreed Miss Winthrop.

“That’s Mrs. Trumbull’s way, anyhow,” smiled Elizabeth. “And, oh, I do want you and the other girls to know her! I didn’t like her at first, but now—well, she’s made me see everything differently. She is so different from us; she knows how to do the things women used to do. She knows how to cook, and to sew, and to keep house, and put up preserves, and—oh, I could n’t begin to tell you all the things she knows. My mother was like that. She knew about such things, too.”

“I don’t think my mother did,” confessed Miss Winthrop.

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"I guess a lot of mothers to-day don't," mused Elizabeth. "That's probably why we girls don't learn."

"But I'd *like* to know," broke in Miss Winthrop.

"You're better than I was," admitted Elizabeth, with a short laugh. "I didn't even want to learn. I—I thought it was n't ladylike. Think of it!"

"You're no worse than the rest of us," laughed Miss Winthrop. "We'd think so now, if it was n't for you."

"And you don't think so now?" asked Elizabeth.

"I'd be ashamed to look you in the face and say so," answered Miss Winthrop.

"I know you might be ashamed to *say* so, but do you *think* so?"

"Honestly I don't. I can't say I'm crazy to learn to cook, but I know I *ought* to learn."

"Oh, you'd like it after a while. Why now—I even like to get breakfast."

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“Ugh! I don’t believe I’d ever get that far!”

“Yes, you would,” exclaimed Elizabeth. “You’d get to like to do things for yourself, no matter what. It makes you feel so free.”

Elizabeth’s face reflected her enthusiasm. Her eyes were bright and her cheeks flushed. She had never talked so earnestly with any one about anything. She meant every word she said.

“But we have n’t such nice little houses to learn in,” answered Miss Winthrop. “It would n’t be so much fun in an apartment.”

“Then,” exclaimed Elizabeth, “why don’t you come down here and learn?”

“Why, Beth, what do you mean?”

“That you start a cooking class to meet here one afternoon a week; and a sewing class to meet another afternoon. I’d love to share this house with you—with all my friends.”

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“Beth!” exclaimed Miss Winthrop.

“And Mrs. Trumbull says she ’ll help us and—oh, *do* you want to do it?”

“Why, I think it would be great! We might make a club. We might call ourselves the ‘Old-Fashioned Girls.’ ”

“Good!” agreed Elizabeth, her quick brain developing the idea. “And whatever we did we could do in an old-fashioned way. We could have dances and not allow any girl to come who hadn’t made her own dress; we could have spreads, but every girl must bring some of her own cooking. Each girl could make some one thing; I would make the butter, you could make the bread—”

“I make the bread?” chuckled Miss Winthrop. “I guess that would end the party.”

“No, you can learn. Why, Mr. Harden can make biscuits, and Roy—”

“Can make doughnuts,” Miss Winthrop finished for her. “Brother Dick says he ’s

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prouder of that than being captain of the baseball team."

"Well, it *is* something to be proud of," returned Elizabeth.

"Dick said he'd beat Roy in one thing anyhow, and bothered the cook all one afternoon trying to make angel cake."

Elizabeth laughed, and Miss Winthrop rose to go.

"I 'll see Helen and Jane this afternoon," she declared. "I wish we could hold our meeting next Saturday."

"We can," agreed Elizabeth. "You talk with all the girls, and then we 'll make out a list and ask them here to tea. But I only want those who honestly wish to learn."

"I think about ten of us will be enough to start with," nodded Miss Winthrop. "I 'll see you again, and we 'll decide whom we 'll take in as charter members. Then perhaps later we can make it larger."

In this way the club was founded. Soon

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it was deemed a privilege to belong to it, and to-day it is still growing and making itself felt in more ways than one.

But Elizabeth still had one thing at heart, more vital than her ambitions for the Old-Fashioned Girls. As November passed, and December came and Christmas began to loom up, and still her father lived his lonely and solitary life at "The Towers," she seemed to have failed in the one big undertaking which had furnished her with the spirit to enter upon her new life with such good grace. Apparently she had not yet made her home attractive enough to draw him to it. She had succeeded in making herself proud of it, in making her friends proud of it, but without her father it was not, after all, really and truly her home.

One day Elizabeth surprised Mrs. Trumbull by announcing:

"I'm going to move into the spare room."

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“What are you going to do that for?” demanded Mrs. Trumbull. “The front room is the sunniest and best in the house.”

“That,” declared Elizabeth, “is where Daddy is going to live.”

“Where—do you mean to tell me your father has come round at last?” asked Mrs. Trumbull excitedly.

“Not yet,” answered Elizabeth. “But I expect him to live here after Christmas.”

“What makes you expect that?” persisted Mrs. Trumbull.

Elizabeth only laughed.

“You wait and see,” she answered.

Elizabeth transferred into the spare room all her own personal belongings. They were not many, and she had to buy a few simple things, because everything that was her mother’s she left behind.

“Now,” she said, after she had done that, “I want you to tell me, just as near

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as you can remember, just how Mother's room used to look."

"It didn't look very different from the way it looks now," said Mrs. Trumbull. "A few of her things may have been packed away in her trunks, but most everything is here."

"Then we must look through the trunks," explained Elizabeth. "There is one of them we have not opened yet."

"But what are you planning to do?" questioned Mrs. Trumbull.

"I want to make her room look exactly as it did when she was here," said Elizabeth. "Perhaps then, if I bring Daddy up here on Christmas Day, and he sees things just as they used to be, he'll want to come back and live the way he used to live. And then—"

Her voice broke. She clung impulsively to Mrs. Trumbull.

"Oh!" she cried, "I do so want my

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daddy here! Don't you see, I can't really be the Lady of the Lane without him!"

"There, dear, there," whispered Mrs. Trumbull, tenderly. "I guess—well, I guess he'll come home on Christmas Day."

They ransacked the attic and found many things which they had not noticed before. Elizabeth drew from a corner two of her mother's favorite chairs which had been put away because they were slightly broken, but Martin mended them, and they were as good as ever. Then there were some yellowed muslin curtains.

"Land sakes!" exclaimed Mrs. Trumbull, "I do believe these are the very ones she had when she first came down here!"

Washing and bluing and bleaching made them white and fresh again, and Elizabeth herself hung them in place.

There were also some old pictures, and Elizabeth dusted these, cleaned the frames,

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and hung them where, as well as Mrs. Trumbull could remember, they had been before. But the rarest treasure of all was a miniature portrait of her mother, which Elizabeth found tucked away in the bottom of a trunk. Mrs. Churchill had had it painted in her wedding-dress. Mrs. Trumbull put on her spectacles and stared at it until her own eyes grew misty. Then she handed it to Elizabeth.

“There!” she exclaimed, “if you want to see how you look to-day, look at this!”

“How I wish I were half so lovely,” said Elizabeth, her lips trembling.

“I don’t believe in flattering girls, but you’re her living image!” answered Mrs. Trumbull, trying to wipe her eyes with her apron without being seen. “I declare! it seems almost as though she was going to speak to you.”

Reverently Elizabeth pressed the picture to her lips.

“Dear Mother!” she faltered.

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“And if *that* does n’t bring your father back here, nothing will,” added Mrs. Trumbull.

“I shall put it on the little table by the bed,” said Elizabeth, “and I shall bank it all up with holly and evergreen.”

“You won’t need the evergreen,” declared Mrs. Trumbull. “I don’t believe your father knows about this picture. It will be almost like seeing her again.”

A week before Christmas, Mr. Churchill came down one evening with an invitation for them both to spend that day with him at “The Towers.” But Elizabeth shook her head.

“No, Daddy,” she said breathlessly. “You must come down here on that day.”

“But I thought—”

“Not another word, Daddy,” answered Elizabeth, placing her fingers over his lips.

To her relief he did not insist.

“The chef will never forgive me if I’m

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not there for Christmas dinner," he laughed.

"You tell the chef that he 'd better spend the day with his family," broke in Mrs. Trumbull. "That 's the place for folks on Christmas!"

"All right," agreed Mr. Churchill.

The next six days were busy ones in the little house by the lane. Wreaths of holly, tied with scarlet ribbons, appeared in every window. In the front room, and the dining-room, and "Daddy's room," as she now called the upper front chamber, Elizabeth also hung long festoons of green and scarlet. She quite exhausted two weeks' allowance in these purchases, which Mrs. Trumbull considered extravagant.

"First thing you know, you won't have enough to buy your Christmas dinner," protested the good lady.

"It is n't the dinner that 's going to count," declared Elizabeth, "it 's having

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the house bright and cheerful and home-like and Christmasy."

"Maybe you're right," nodded Mrs. Trumbull.

On Christmas morning, it began to snow, and this emphasized still more the bright colors within. As early as ten o'clock, Elizabeth lighted the open fire in the front room.

"I wish I could light the candles, too," she hesitated.

"Sakes alive, child!" exclaimed Mrs. Trumbull, "you don't need anything more than that picture up-stairs. I feel as though your mother's presence were lighting the whole house."

"You do?" asked Elizabeth, eagerly. "And so do I. But Daddy—"

"Don't you worry about him. I've kind of felt all this week he must have known that was up there. He's been more like his old self than I've seen him in ten years."

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“Oh, I wish the day would hurry to one o’clock,” Elizabeth exclaimed impatiently.

She went up-stairs to dress, and by the time she had finished she had no more than time to hurry down and take a look at all the good things in the kitchen, before there was a knock at the front door. She herself opened it to admit her father.

“Merry Christmas, Daddy!” she cried.

“And to you, my dear,” he answered.

She took his hat and coat from him and hung them up. Then as he stepped toward the front room, she seized his hand.

“Come with me, Daddy,” she whispered.

In some wonder, he followed her up the stairs. Before opening the door, she paused and kissed him once again. Then, without a word, she led him in. His eyes fell at once upon the picture by the bed. With something almost like a cry he

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crossed to it, seized it, and held it before him with a trembling hand.

“Where—where did you get this?” he asked.

“It was here all the time—waiting for you, Daddy,” answered Elizabeth.

He looked around the room.

“It seems as though—it seems as though she *must* be here,” he murmured.

Trembling, half between sobs and laughter, Elizabeth waited. There was so much she wanted to say that she could n’t say! And yet she felt as though the picture was saying to him all that was dumb on her own lips.

“She *must* be here!” he repeated.

Then he turned to the girl. His tense mouth relaxed. He drew his daughter into his arms.

“Why, she *is* here!” he cried. “Dear little Lady of the Lane!”

“And you, Daddy, won’t you stay here, too?” whispered Elizabeth.



"Why, she *is* here!" he cried. "Dear little Lady of the Lane."

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“Yes,” he answered. “This is the place for me—here in this little house with you.”

From below there was the sound of a loud rap on the kitchen door, and a moment later they both heard Roy’s voice:

“Merry Christmas, everybody!”

“Merry Christmas, Roy!” answered Elizabeth.

“Can you come down a moment?” he shouted back.

Holding her father’s hand, Elizabeth led him down into the little sitting-room. Roy was carrying in his arm a box as tall as he was.

“From the fellows,” he said as he presented it. “To the little Lady of the Lane, with a Merry Christmas.”

With trembling fingers, she undid the string, and found seventeen beautiful long-stemmed roses.

“Oh, Roy! How beautiful!” she fal-

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tered, her voice breaking, and her eyes growing moist.

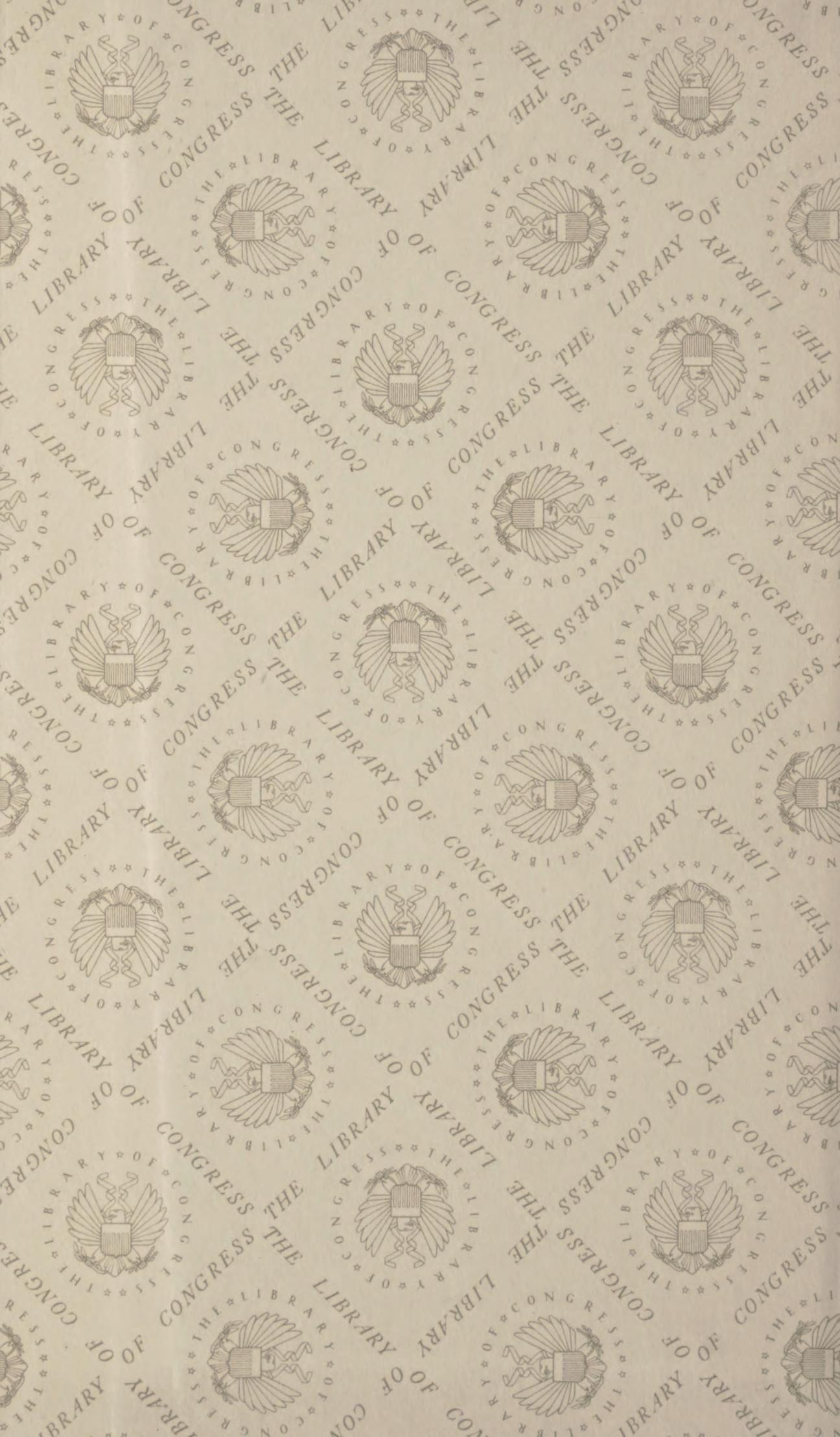
But she didn't have time to say more before there was another rap at the door, and the expressman presented a box. It contained a beautiful tennis racket from the Old-Fashioned Girls, with the very best wishes for a Merry Christmas.

THE END

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